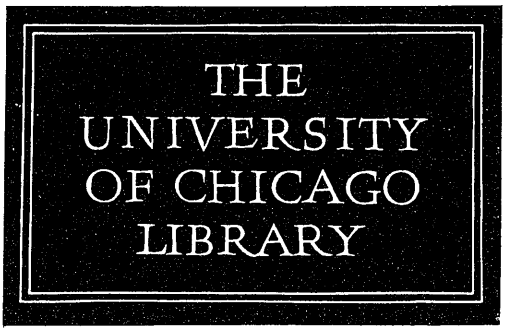

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Printed by
LORIMER AND CHALMERS,
FOR
T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH.
LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT, AND CO. LIMITED
NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.



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I.

THE SEER'S HOUSE.

"Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is."—1 SAMUEL ix. 18.

I.

THE SEER'S HOUSE.

SOME time ago I was looking into a little book published in our city with this title—"Memorable Edinburgh Houses": and it seemed to suggest the text. You can say it in almost every street and square and suburb—"Somebody once lived here worth remembering." "Tell me where the Seer's house is."

Not many cities are as rich in such memories as ours. Before the time when the road to London was made short and easy, our men of genius were more easily kept at home. Edinburgh was a centre, a capital. All that was best in Scottish life and thought and literature and enterprise gathered to this grey metropolis. There were living here great Scottish nobles and great Scottish statesmen, Scottish philosophers and poets, as well as great doctors and preachers and lawyers. The places made memorable by their presence are with us still. Among the crowded closes and "lands" of the High Street and the Canongate, and in the wide streets and squares of the West End, as well as here and there in the remoter suburbs, there are "memorable Edinburgh houses."

When you stand in a street and look across a city, what a thought it is—the multitudes of unknown, unremembered men and women who have been here before us! What a procession they make —"the dim common populations," walking our streets and filling our city, striving for a season in the same eager passionate way with ourselves, and then passing away without a name or a memory—forgotten as we soon shall be!

But out of those "dim common populations" there are some who have survived the common oblivion. They have a name and a fame among us still, and the places where they lived are not lost and forgotten. The memory of them redeems our city from the dull monotony of common life; and as we travel through its streets with a lively imagination, we may bring back the great ones who once were here. It gives an added interest to every turn we take as we say—"Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is."

There is a house in North Castle Street that is worth looking at—No. 39. There is nothing striking on the outside, nothing to make it conspicuous among the houses that are round about it. A passer-by might never realise that he is gazing on one of the most memorable houses in the world. A Seer's house surely; for it was there that Sir Walter Scott lived. It was in the dim room at the back of that house that he did his best work.

A Seer surely! What a vision and faculty were his! Think of what gathered about him in that dim place! What a world he lived in! It rose about him as beneath a wizard's wand, peopled with a host of living men and women, making their way through many a tale of love and war and strange adventure. They came at his call out of many centuries and many lands. The common things about him faded away; before his inner eye the bright pageant passed; and he wrote as he saw.

But there are grander gifts than those of a bright imagination. There is a vision and a faculty diviner far. Surely the most memorable of Edinburgh houses is this at the foot of the High Street, where John Knox spent the last years of his strenuous life. There is no other name that we can place beside his: he has not an equal in Scottish story: he is Scotland's greatest son—the man who has left upon the character of his countrymen an impress unrivalled in modern times, the man to whom we owe our high place and our happier fate among the nations, the man who fought our battle for us and won our liberty when the crisis was keenest and the odds tremendous.

Think of what this man was, and where he stood, what questions he handled and settled, what words he spoke, what work he did; and then imagine what a centre his house was of interest and influence and power. It was like the house of Calvin at Geneva. The Court of many a king and

the Cabinet of many a minister had less of real dominion. They came to it from all quarters and on all kinds of errands. "All sorts and conditions of men frequented it: now a Scottish noble in coat of mail: now the English or French ambassador in gay attire: now a priest in disguise: now a minister in Geneva cloak: now a peasant to get this clerical tribune's influence against some noble's exactions: now men and women of all ranks seeking spiritual advice and comfort." * They came to him from every quarter: and as they climbed the steep street they said—"Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is."

Yes, the Seer's house: Knox was a man who could see far and sure, with a firm clear eye for any intricate or difficult business, more than a match for the subtle diplomacy of kings and ambassadors or the greedy guile of self-seeking nobles and lairds. He was the man who could let in surprising light on any policy or intrigue.

But there was more than common shrewdness, more than rare political sagacity that made him worthy of the name of "seer." There was spiritual insight—the vision of the prophet. He saw God and the Kingdom of God and the things that are unseen and eternal; and in that dazzling light he looked upon his country, and its Church and people, and all the contendings and the changes of his time. He saw God and the Kingdom of God; and for poor

* Lord Guthrie.

bewildered Scotland he sought it and fought for it—to have the life of his people brought under this righteous dominion and blessed by it. All his life was governed by this—"as seeing Him who is invisible." And not for his country only, but for the souls of men he saw God and the grace of God, and the wonders of a redeemed experience. That house of his was a place of light and leading and heavenly comfort, and many resorted thither. You could hear them say it as they went up the steep street—"Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is."

Now this is the thought that the text suggests. It reminds us of the interest there is about great men ; indeed, the necessity that we should have them in the life of the community. There must be some folk bigger than the rest. What an unworkable world it would be if we were all equal and alike, left to the dull monotony of mediocre minds ! But here and there we find what we wish to see. One or two great men in a generation redeem it from the ordinary and commonplace. Every mother wishes one son a genius whatever the rest may be. Please God, one genius in the family. And in the city—why, the knowledge that in the city is the man who discovered chloroform, or the man who wrote a great poem or a great book, or the man who carried some great reform — his very presence among us is exhilarating.

It is natural to believe in great men; and life is good only as we believe in such society and actually or ideally manage to live with our superiors. It is the meaning of most of our reading. We want to get into better company. And surely there is nothing more memorable in our experience than to meet the great man in the flesh, to see his face and hear his voice. Men have travelled far to speak to Wordsworth or Tennyson. Men travel far to see the hero of the day and do him homage.

And the reason is this—we see complete in him what we ourselves are only in part. This is the endless attraction of great men. These are our loftier brothers, one in blood. This is our nature come to its best. So the great man in the city makes us all great. We are all wealthier and wiser because the Seer's house is with us.

When we think of the two kinds of great men, men of action and men of thought, surely we may say that the greatest of these are the men of great mind, thinkers and teachers and Seers. The men who work among material things must take a lower place than those who give us ideas, who lead us into the heavenly places. These labour not for the meat that perisheth but for the truth that makes the soul free. These are the greater.

And this brings us to the place of the Prophet in Israel. We find Samuel here in this chapter—the old, grey-headed Seer, with his robe folded about

him, a venerable figure, the oracle of his neighbourhood.

It is a curious story, this of the lost asses; and we wonder that Saul should go to Samuel on such a quest. Yet it is a true picture of the Prophet's place that makes him thus the centre of light and leading, and his house the place to which men gather for true guidance and teaching. Though it begins here in ordinary affairs it passes to higher interests and issues; and the Prophet is the Seer—not because of any common shrewdness but because of spiritual vision. This is the truth about his office and his message. He saw God. "The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel," and in the light of that heavenly vision he saw everything else.

For the place for understanding things is near God. The Psalmist, remembering his perplexity, says—"Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood." And the Prophet had his dwelling there. He saw God, and then he saw everything else. He saw the true value of things; the idolatries and hypocrisies and shams were exposed. He saw the forces that were at work in the world; and all the craft and wealth and war of worldly men were useless to resist the certainties of God's righteous government. He saw the ideals that were shining on before and surely coming—the Kingdom of God and His Anointed, and the blessings of His wide and peaceful reign.

There is vision first and then speech. The

Speaker, we are told, is first of all a Seer. His tongue is tied till his eyes are opened. And he sees nothing till he sees God. It was this that made the Prophet—"Jehovah, before whom I stand." And still it is the man to whom God is a vivid reality; it is the man who discerns beyond the narrow limits of this present life the splendour of the eternal world and God who is its King—this is the man who sees everything else, and who can speak to us the word of truth and duty.

Is it not what we have supremely in Jesus Christ? He is the Seer, and so He speaks. His words are simple and sure and convincing, because He is telling us what He has seen. What eyes Christ had—with true discernment in them—eyes that looked things through and through and saw new meanings everywhere! He saw God; and what a world it was beneath His eyes! He saw the lilies as lilies had never been seen before. He saw the birds, so much a part of the great world that God had made, that not one could fall without the Father's notice. And when He looked on men and women, think of what He saw—at the Treasury one day in the widow's slender gift, and in the penitent woman at His feet, and in the Pharisee stripped bare of all his insincerities. He saw the soul and its infinite worth; His eye discerned the pathway of its everlasting destiny; He saw the promise of eternal good and the risk of an infinite loss. What a power of sight! When shall we look on sky and field, on

bread and money, on life and death, into the faces of men and women as Christ did, and shape our life according to such seeing?

Men felt the wonder of it as He led them into a new world; and they said, "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" We would learn more of Thy secret; let us go home with Thee, and sit at Thy feet, and be Thy disciples. "Master, where dwellest Thou?" "Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is."

After all, the great difference between one man and another is difference of vision, of eyesight and insight and foresight. We know how often in life success depends on this,—the power to see a little farther, a little more, than other people see. The financier, the man of business, the statesman—their larger outlook is the measure of their power. But there is another vision that makes a mightier difference between man and man. More than sagacity or fancy there is faith—the higher vision of the soul that sees God and the things of God. Faith is a keener sight, a second sight, a new sense opened on another and an invisible world. Believing is Seeing.

Religion is not a matter of uncertain beliefs. It is not unreal, fanciful, visionary, and unsubstantial. People are often tempted to think so. It is the unreality of a great deal of our religion that strikes men. They are engaged with the realities of business all through the week, counting hard cash and driving

hard bargains; and when the Sabbath morning comes and they are here, what a change! Nothing to handle, and nothing to see! The unseen things we speak of seem unsubstantial and unreal. Ah! we need to be reminded that these are the realities, and that the time is coming when they will be the only realities, when the material shadows melt away, and only the spiritual substance remains, and that spiritual world is present to the soul as now this world that fills the eye.

We need to resist the tyranny of the senses. We need to gain and keep all possible impressions of the unseen; and especially we want to keep near to believing men and women, near to those whose faith is stronger and whose sight is keener than our own. We want to get up to the high places where the Prophet lives—to that Mizpah where the man of God has his large and lofty outlook. It is the believing man who makes believing men. It is not the blind who can lead the blind; and we say, "Tell me, where the Seer's house is."

This is what happens often in life. The young man seeks the Seer, and life is changed. He is called with a high calling. Samuel says—"You have mistaken your vocation; you were not meant to go wandering through the land hunting a herd of asses; you should be a king; you are built for it, Saul, a royal presence yours."

And when we meet the Seer and the light of God

falls at our feet, it turns us into new paths. It calls us with a high calling. We have been giving ourselves to poor sport. The Seer sees us as God sees us—called to be kings, born to be kings.

How much Samuel could do for this well-built youth if he would only listen! He could be a Conscience to the king and speak the will of God to all his waywardness. Samuel could keep the light of God playing about the king's throne and the king's path. But we know what happened. Samuel was Saul's minister, and the king was a poor listener. How he fell away, and the tragedy finished in gloom and ruin! Because Saul never came to see as Samuel saw.

Every Saul seeks his Samuel. Still among us there are such men, men whose eyes have been opened, who see life steadily and see it whole, who tell us the truth about it—men of God in every city.

What books am I to read? What master shall I follow? What church should I go to? "Tell me, where the Seer's house is." This is a question that is often lightly asked and lightly answered. People go to one church or another for all manner of insufficient reasons. Because the music is very good, or because the sermon is very short, or because of the social opportunities that come in their way, or because somebody else goes there. It is worthy of deeper concern. Church-going is one of the common things in life on which vast interests may hang.

The Church is the Seer's house. It is the place of vision; and if there is no vision, not a glimpse of heavenly light and not a throb of spiritual power in all our service, if it is but the blind leading the blind, what a perversion of our function, what a loss of opportunity!

"Tell me, I pray thee, where the Seer's house is." Surely there are such men among us still, men who are sincere as they speak of eternal things. It is the power of a great Prophet. What I see myself, I may help you to see. What I believe myself, I can make you believe. Conviction breeds conviction; faith awakens faith. The Seer's house is the place where your eyes may be opened. It is the lesson of all the prophetic element in Israel's history; and when you find a man who can impress you with a sense of the reality of spiritual things, and so bring you face to face with great spiritual questions that you feel that you must make up your mind about them, that man has the spirit and power of a true Prophet; and it is for your soul's eternal well-being that you listen to him.

II
ISAAC.

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide."
—GENESIS xxiv. 63.

II.

ISAAC.

THIS is a quite typical incident—when the lively damsel leaps from her camel into the life of this meditative man. The great possessions and experiences of life come to Isaac. He does not seek them. He does not win his bride. She comes to him across the desert, wooed and won for him by another. Isaac is the kind of man who needs to have things done for him. Esau must hunt for his venison, and Eliezer must bring him his wife. The marriage is arranged.

It is so different from what we find in the life of Isaac's son. Jacob had to travel far and toil wearily to win the woman he loved the best. There was no possibility of arranging a marriage or anything else for Jacob. He was too fond of arranging things for himself. But Isaac was of another temper. We read this lively, lovely chapter, and confess that there is nothing like it in any literature. We see the aged patriarch laying his commands upon the servant he could trust. We follow the camels across the desert, and find them at last kneeling for water beside the village well, where Eliezer meets the frank,

active, generous girl, and settles in his heart that this is she. We watch with eager interest as this sagacious man pursues his happy quest, and wins a willing answer. But through it all we say, Where is Isaac—the man, as we think, who has the deepest stake in this adventure? That very night when the maid was won, and Laban's house was bright with the betrothal feast, and Rebekah wore her jewels, Isaac is five hundred miles away, at Beersheba—meditating in the field at eventide. That was the kind of man—never consulted, never asking to be consulted, lifting up his eyes to see what God would send him.

So here they meet—Rebekah, as we see her in this chapter, eager and high-spirited, active, energetic, and decided; and Isaac, dreamy and retiring. Wherever we find Isaac, he is in presence of natures stronger and more active than his own. In his early days Ishmael is in the camp, the bold, imperious youth with the passionate blood of his gipsy mother. He grows to manhood, overshadowed by the grand, heroic presence of Abraham. Even beside his own boys it is his weakness that is in evidence. So destitute of enterprise and energy himself, the bravery of Esau wakens in his eye the light of a father's fondness. He listens with delight to the evening tales—tales from the hills; and he loves the brave boy for all he could not be himself; while he almost fears, he cannot love, he cannot understand the deep cunning and keen craft of Jacob. And in this closest tie of

all, Rebekah's quick intelligence, her alert, decided ways, and her strong will are too much for Isaac; and he comes to be managed, even outwitted, outmanœuvred by her clever scheming. Take him anywhere, the contrast appears; and beside the strong, the brave, the clever, the enterprising, Isaac is evermore the same—a quiet, patient, much-enduring, meditative man.

Abraham—Isaac—Jacob. These are the three great names. I daresay we have often been impressed by the difference between Isaac and the other two. Abraham and Jacob are, each in his own way, great; but Isaac between is in no way remarkable. Only a link between the other two, he serves to maintain the succession and keep things going.

And surely there is something to be thankful for here, that such a man should have a place in such a great succession. God has a place for the quiet man. It seems to be a law of our life, that it goes forward in alternate periods of progress and of rest. Isaac is the rest between. There are times, not for progress, but for waiting; and Isaac is here, not to make any new departure, but just to keep and transmit the blessing; and a quiet man will do—sometimes only a quiet man will do.

We should be thankful for this lesson. The fathers and founders of the chosen race were not all men of heroic mould. God has a place for the

quiet man. Isaac was never out in the world doing great deeds. Abraham's career had carried him from the Euphrates to the Nile. He had been over all that ancient world. And Jacob, too, had travelled far from home. But Isaac did not travel. Born at Beersheba, he kept to the pastures of the South, on the edge of the desert, away from the tents and towns of men, and never more than a few miles from the spot of his birth. Such a modest, home-loving life it was, tame and domestic, monotonous, retired, holding no conspicuous place in the eyes of men, with no brilliant adventure or exploit.

Many a happy and fruitful life has been spent like that, far from the stir and tumult of the world. Where is the best life of our land to-day? Where does it come from, and how is it fed? Some of us perhaps are just one remove from a country home, bearing about with us its fragrant memories, carrying a name that is never named in village or glen without reverence and affection, because of those who have borne it before us. All that is best in us we get from them. Judged by a worldly standard, their life seems of little account; but the guileless years, the gracious deeds, the daily thoughts and thanks and prayers, the simple piety of such a life are in the sight of God of great price. Thank God for the quiet men and women who never did great things, who never travelled far from home!

Now let us think of this as we find it here in

Isaac—this side of his character. We may take it first as it suggests itself in our text, and then let it lead us on to other places in his life—this quiet side of character. Take it in three words—*pensive, patient, passive.*

I. Pensive:—"Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide."

He was living at his favourite haunt by the well of Lahai-roi, Hagar's well. And we can see him on this evening before the day of his marriage, out from the tents all by himself, wandering and wondering, silently musing. About him the soft pastures and the gathering shadows and the hush of eventide—the "pastoral melancholy"; and the soul within in sweet harmony with the peace that reigns around. This is the man. He has been called somewhat fancifully "the Wordsworth of the Old Testament," the solitary wandering away from the haunts of men to the sanctuary of Nature and the presence of God with a soul open to every impression. Like the little mountain-tarn, reflecting like a mirror in its clear and tranquil waters, by day the mountains that encompass it, and all the night the lights of heaven—like that little mountain tarn, so Isaac waited and reflected and mused.

There are many of us who need to learn how to meditate. No doubt, there is a weakness here that is very enfeebling. It may be done so as to hurt you. Day-dreaming does you no good—building castles in

the air. But if you know how to do it, "wisely passive," such quiet lonely wandering and musing becomes a means of grace.

That eventide is far away in the past; but is it not a human touch that brings Isaac and his story very near to us? We too are drawn out into the fields at eventide when the fret and toil of day are over, when the sun is setting and the land is still, when the flowers are closing and the flocks are folded, when the moon is coming up and the stars are coming out, when a hush comes over the world and into the soul, in the dusk, in the gloaming. Then is the time to think and dream and pray, and get the heart calmed and soothed and solemnised.

We need to keep that time. There are many of us who are energetic enough through the day, but we do not close the day aright. You take your business home with you, and you never know that happy hour when the worry of it steals away. "Unquietness," says an old writer, "is the greatest evil that can come into the soul except sin." Restlessness is next to sin in the damage it does to the soul. You do not know how much you lose without this tranquil, pensive mood. You must be quiet to get the best impressions from the best thoughts and the best things—like the mountain-tarn whose unruffled surface takes into it the very heavens in their height. "Be still, my soul." The fruitful hours in life are not the busiest and the noisiest.

You do not need to be always struggling and always seeking. Something will come to you if you wait for it. There is a blessing in being quiet, "in a wise passiveness."

II. And Patient:—It is not difficult to guess what happens when the meditative man passes into the world's busy life. The attitude of his mind as he yields to currents of thought and feeling, open to every impression and every influence—this, too, is his attitude to life, yielding and receptive and submissive.

Isaac is not a man of action. He is never master of the situation. We never meet Isaac in positive and decided action. There is always a stronger presence, a more aggressive personality, a character more forcible before which he yields and endures.

Even as a boy we see it—the gentle, laughing Isaac has no chance against Ishmael. As a son we see it—he gave to Abraham unbroken, unquestioning obedience. And in his own home his is still a secondary place. Rebekah is not the woman to yield to his mild nature, and boys like Esau and Jacob are soon more than a match for such a father. Isaac is not the governing presence in his own tent. Always there is about him something patient, submissive, meek.

But though this is often weak and pitiful, it is sometimes Christian and strong. There is a strength that is made perfect in such weakness; and the man

who yields is stronger than the man who fights. "Blessed are the meek." Perhaps we see it best in the story of how the Philistines harassed him about his wells. When Isaac's servants had bored through the hard limestone and found the sweet, springing water, there were those who were quick to envy them their good success. Round the well and for the well angry words might soon have turned to bloody strife, but Isaac draws his men away to seek another spring; and when this, too, becomes the scene of strife, he makes another move among the hills to find another well. And Isaac's enemies at last were conquered by such kindness, by this strange magnanimity. It was a triumph gained not by strength but by character.

People say, "No, you've got to fight for it—have the quarrel out; it is a struggle for existence—stand upon your rights." What did Isaac do? When he was asked to leave one place, he left. When the Philistines stopped his father's wells, he quietly dug them out again. When the Philistine herdmen wrangled with his shepherds about a spring, he simply gave it up and sought another; and when this, too, was disputed, he retired and sank a third. He would "trek" farther into the wilderness rather than fight when he is meddled with. He conquers by patience and meekness.

Men call it weakness and cry it down. It may be weakness sometimes, but sometimes, too, it is the strongest strength. The easy thing is to fight, to

let yourself go like a beast in angry passion. The hard thing is to sit still and say nothing, to retire and give in. Who can deny that at least it is Christ's way to be weak, and by willing weakness at last to conquer? He reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not; He turned His cheek to the smiter. He was made perfect through such cruelty and wrong and injustice; and where little men stand up for their rights, He endured the Cross. Blessed are the meek.

III. And this last word—Passive; splendidly passive,—on the very altar bound for sacrifice!

This side of Isaac's character comes to its highest in that one event, that story of undying interest. As we read the chapter, we are so taken up with Abraham that we often forget the splendid part that Isaac played that day. They went, both of them together, climbing the mountain-track side by side and step by step, going up the altar stairs—priest and victim, the lad led like a lamb. They had gone before, but always Abraham had taken a lamb; and Isaac's wondering question pierced him to the heart, "Where is the lamb?" How the awful secret was told him we may not know. But there was no remonstrance or resistance. The strong youth might easily have escaped; but as he had carried the wood like Christ, so like Him, too, he suffered himself to be bound and laid upon the rude altar. With what sweetness and courage and simple trust and

patient resignation he made himself a willing sacrifice — that deepest note in his nature, that willingness to yield in silence to the will of another, coming to this lofty moment when he bows to the will of his father and his father's God, ready to die, closing his eyes at the flash of the uplifted knife, splendidly passive.

Is it not ever true that the highest faith is surrender, and the noblest life is sacrifice? You cannot fill the place God is keeping for you, or do the work God is laying to your hand, or inherit the blessing God is preparing for you—you cannot enter into life as God wants your life to be, except by such sacrifice. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

If a man is good at all, at some point of his life he becomes evidently Christ-like, for all good is in Him. It is Christ who has saved for us this gentler side of character, and revealed to us its hidden strength and real glory; and if you have no sympathy with this kind of thing,—if you see only the weakness and the softness of it, then you are away from the mind of Christ altogether. It is His peculiar service to remind us of the greatness of the lowly and the meek and the patient. The road by which He travelled is marked like Isaac's, by the places where He thought and prayed, by the wells where He would not strive, and by the altar where He suffered, for Isaac is a true type of Him that was to come—pensive and patient and passive.

III.

THE BLESSING OF GAD.

"Gad, a troop shall overcome him : but he shall overcome at the last."—GENESIS xlix. 19.

III.

THE BLESSING OF GAD.

IT is a striking scene that is set before us in this chapter, when the dying Patriarch gathers about his bed the fathers of the tribes of Israel. They come from the pastures and from the tents, with the breath of field and flock about them; and they stand round the bed where the old man is lying.

Jacob knew well those sons of his. He had studied them through the long years. Those stalwart sons were like an open book beneath his keen eyes, and he read them as the pages passed day after day. Now they stand round his bed, the fathers of the tribes of Israel; and he can trace the characters they will transmit, and the fortunes they will make. He sees the Land of Promise occupied and divided, each finding his fitting place and portion—the warlike and the peaceful, the active and the indolent, the adventurous and the easy, the strong and the unstable. Some of the verses are brief and perplexing like the words of an oracle. We have lost the key; we can hardly interpret them. But some, like the text, are more simple. We can seize the

principle; we can see a kind of character and career in this motto on the banner of Gad.

"Gad," says Jacob, as he looks round upon his sons and the turn of this son comes, "what shall I say of Gad?" The name suggests his blessing, for the Hebrew word "gad" means "troop"; and in the text there is a triple play upon the word. "Troops shall troop upon him, but he shall troop on them retreating." "Raiders shall raid him, but he shall raid upon them at last." Something like that is the reading of it.

When the tribes of Israel came up from Egypt, Gad did not cross the Jordan but remained eastward on the edge of the desert. The text refers to the kind of life that would be theirs, pressed by border war. Jacob harps upon the name, and prophesies that many a troop shall come sweeping up from the desert upon Gad, making raids into the country and retreating, raiding and retreating. And this is the happy message — "He shall overcome." Sore pressed and sometimes defeated, yet he will in the end be victorious.

It is a heartening word; and we might take this lesson from Jacob and oftener speak such a word to men and women who have their battle to fight, overcome it may be and defeated for a time and needing just such a word as this to make them fight again. They should be encouraged. They should be told that failure is impossible. They can never be defeated till they give in; and if they never give

in, they must overcome at the last. Let the troops come, troop upon troop, temptation upon temptation, so long as we do not lie down to them, so long as we can rise and fight again, there is hope. "He shall overcome."

Yes, you should say it oftener. Say it to your children. How pathetic to see your child fighting his temptations! You must stand aside, but you can speak to him. This is a father's word to his son. This father has one son who makes him sad because he is "unstable as water." But there is another, not soft and unstable, but hardy and brave, inured to peril and conflict,—"dogged," we say. The father saw his struggle, watched the conflict of his life, and said: "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome." He saw the defeats, but he was sure of the victory. His father knew this boy, and did not judge him hardly for one failure, but rather heartened him to fight better, and hoped for him "at the last."

And this child of yours—what will he be at the last? This son of yours—he is only twelve or thirteen, eighteen or twenty, and of course he has his ups and downs. Do not think hardly of him or speak harshly to him because of one repulse. There is a great deal of time yet, a long campaign; and you should help him in it, by hoping the best for him and telling him you expect it, as Jacob did. "He shall overcome at the last."

What a blessing they bring to us—the encouragers, who put heart into us when we are beaten, who

make us feel when we fail that we may fight again! When we have something difficult to do and our work is cut out for us, still they tell us they expect us to get through with it; they know we can do it; we shall finish all right. Yes, we should covet that place—among the encouragers. We should say it often to our brothers, and take it to ourselves. "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last."

This is the kind of fortune which Jacob foresees for Gad. When the tribes of Israel came up from Egypt, Gad, as I have said, did not cross the Jordan but stayed on the other side. He found his home in the Land of Gilead, a goodly land to live in, but open and near to the Eastern desert from which marauding tribes came rolling in like waves upon the shore. Gad had to keep his territory at the point of the sword, and fight for his place against repeated attempts to drive him over the river.

And such a life developed the fighting temper that is also reflected in the text. Gad reared a race of daring spirits. The men of Gad were brave, manly, independent; and later story tells how well they kept this character. It was this tribe that gave to David his most valiant warriors; and the men of Gad who followed David are described as "men of might, men of war, fit for the battle, who could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were swift as the roes upon the mountains."

This is the kind of life by which such men are made—the life that prevails in any border-country in rude and lawless times, on the line between the Highlands and the Lowlands, or along the border between England and Scotland, the life of the raiders and moss-troopers and freebooters. It was the fortune of Gad in Gilead—the fighting tribe.

It is always true to say that in this life of ours there is a great deal of fighting to do. Some of us perhaps are so peaceful, and to live beside us is a perpetual Sabbath. Perhaps! Ah! but that is not life. Look within and see the struggle. You have a battle to fight, a hard, cruel battle, not of one day or two, against the world and the flesh and the devil, against temptations and doubts and difficulties. Whatever it costs, you must get the better of these enemies.

No fact is more apparent than this—that the law of life is a law of struggle. Every step is one of conflict; and just to live, to survive, is a victory. Is it not our latest lesson—that all the strength and beauty are wrought out by incessant strife, so purchased, so won by conflict? Life works out its meaning and reaches its results by a continual battle. All that is good and worthy in life must be won in struggle and achievement. No conflict, no crown.

God sets us in the place where we must fight—in the border-country, open to the desert and its wild tribes. So He honours us with our opportunity. Yet He never makes life so hard for us that we

cannot be victorious, never so hard that we may not find victory at the end of it. "He shall overcome at the last."

Perhaps the lesson of the text is in this word—"at the last." Nothing is settled till the end comes. If we may say it, nothing is final but the end. Take the fight to the finish; the last result is the true result.

In the story of Gad there are mingled moments of defeat and victory, but it ends in victory. Living on the edge of the desert and pressed and harassed by border-war, the men of Gad were not always victorious. There was many a skirmish and foray in which they seemed to have the worst of it. But, however it was, here and there, in raiding and retreating, this gallant tribe never gave in, and at the last they overcame.

So it was said of the Romans — "Sometimes defeated in battle, but never beaten in war." It is not one fight that decides but a long campaign. It is not the start but the finish that wins the race. Wait till the Fifth Act—"He that endureth to the end."

"Beaten in battle, never beaten in war." It is true to our own experience. Think of the long war in South Africa. We were beaten often, outwitted, overcome—beaten in battle but not in war. There was many an incident in which our soldiers had the worst of it. There were reverses and retreatings and surrenders; and at home there was often disappoint-

ment and impatience and anxiety. But through all the changing story of what was happening here and there over that vast arena there was one steady movement. The conflict was drifting to its inevitable end; and "at the last" it was settled beyond a doubt.

"Beaten in battle, but not in war." "A troop shall overcome him"—here and there he is worsted in a skirmish—but "he shall overcome at the last."

We speak about the tide of battle, the tide of war. The waters come in, wave upon wave; and, as you watch the rising tide, you must often see how one wave falls short and fails to reach the line where the last wave had been. It has not the force to throw itself as high and sweep out as far. And, if you saw no more than that, you might say that the sea was retreating. But watch for the next and the next—wave upon wave; and see how certainly comes flooding in the main. The tide is making—it is coming to its fulness.

You cannot judge by one wave, one movement; and you cannot judge of any life by one little bit taken out of it. Would you care that any man should fasten on some single incident in your life all by itself, some hour when you were overcome, and say, "See what a man this is"? It would not be fair. If I may vary the illustration, it would be like taking a single square inch from a web woven after a large and elaborate design. Here it is—a little patch of colour dark or bright, like a postage

stamp, but totally inadequate to tell you truly what the pattern means. I want a dozen square yards; I want a whole web of it; I want to see the whole design and meaning of it. And life is one; and you cannot take it in bits and broken pieces. Life is one; and all together it contributes to a final event to which it all moves.

One day or one deed is not enough to be a safe sample of any life; and one defeat is not enough to decide the issue of a long campaign.

Is there anything more heartening than the thought of life's second chance? We are always getting new chances to fight again and fight better. God does not put us to the proof of a single deed, telling us that if we miss this we are lost. If we had but one chance in life, and the first defeat were final, it would fare badly with most of us.

Often we say that opportunities never come twice to us; the lost chance never comes again. It is true, but it is not the whole truth. That same chance does not return, but another comes. No single opportunity comes twice, but other opportunities come. Though the least of life be left, there is yet another chance. A man may have a sore battle to fight—with drink or anything else—and he may be defeated again, and know the bitterness and shame of falling again. Yet he may rise and stand where once he fell. He may take the second chance when the first is lost for ever.

Never judge till you see the end. There may be many failures and a final triumph. Through much tribulation we come to the Kingdom. "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last."

This is the practical admonition of the text. Here is the spirit in which we are to live. Here is a man who simply does not know when he is beaten.

Jacob could read it in this son of his. He had watched him for years, and he knew the stuff he was made of—not like Reuben, "unstable as water," but firm, with a tenacity of purpose that nothing could turn aside, and a determination that could not see difficulty or defeat. There is no question where that man must be "at the last." Give him time—it is all that he needs—"he shall overcome."

Now, I am not to moralise about perseverance, though we do not hear too much of it—the virtue without which all other virtues come to nothing. This gift of continuance is beyond all price—just the power to do it again and again, in face of repeated failure to try again.

It has been said that scarcely a great man can be named who has not failed the first time. There is the classic instance of Disraeli in the House of Commons—when he sat down amid the laughter, saying, "The time will come when you

shall hear me." Indeed, genius has been defined (it is one of its many definitions) as the capacity of surviving failure. Certainly military genius has been more brilliantly displayed in the hour of defeat than of victory, in retrieving disaster. And in the world of business there is genius too. I was reading the other day a review of a book on "Millionaires," and the reviewer said, "What has struck me most is the way in which these men have encountered failure."

The strong man is the man who survives his disappointments, who takes them just for what they are—lessons, maybe blessings in disguise. He learns what they have to teach him. Even the failure quickens his purpose, rouses his energy. His enemies become his friends and teach him how he may defeat themselves.

It was a saying of Confucius—"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Like Gad—"A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last."

It is easy to speak of perseverance. But there is only one thing that enables us to persevere, and that is a religious hopefulness, a hope that rests on faith in God. When the battle is going against us, if we have trust in God, we may find heart to try again. If our life, too, has been blessed by our Father, then we go forth to our battle like the men of Gad, this the banner of our tribe and kindred—"He shall overcome at the last."

It should help us in all our varied conflict—in our business with its reverses, in our families with their cares, in our Christian life with its difficulties. It should sustain us against our temptations, in mending our habits, against the sin that besets us—when we sink again before its attack, and feel that we are worse than ever and it is of no use trying again. Against doubt and misfortune and sorrow—we are not to be crushed beneath it.

Yes, it is a word that comes to us in our Christian experience. Most people find themselves exposed to the risk of being forced back from the open and decided Christian positions, from the places of attainment and of action which Christ expects us to hold. It would be idle to imagine that any life is able to stand firm continually. Most of us who have tried the Christian life know how often we have failed. But this is true—that if a man has once chosen Christ and the good life of the Kingdom, "he shall overcome at the last." His heart is true; and he will not surrender in spite of his frequent failures and defeats. He falls to rise—is baffled to fight better. Be true to your faith, your Leader, and your cause; and it will yet be well with you. "You shall overcome at the last."

After all, does it matter very much what happens through the days of our life if we come right "at the last"? Remember how it comes again and again in the end of the Bible—"To him that overcometh."

This is the triumphant note at the end. This is the promise of life in Christ—"at the last" such a final victory. It is the meaning of St. Paul's great word, "We are more than conquerors." Literally it is "over-overcoming." It points to such abundance of victory that the enemy can never trouble us again. We shall see him no more. We are fighting to such a finish that we shall say, "This is not to do again; we are more than conquerors."

These are the triumphant notes, this the scenery that closes the New Testament. It is by such hopes that men live. Whatever be our present fortunes, these are the last things—the palm and the crown, the banquet and the song.

> "And they who with their Leader
> Have conquered in the fight,
> For ever and for ever,
> Are clad in robes of white."

"He shall overcome at the last."

IV.

KEEP THOU MY FEET.

"He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places."—PSALM xviii. 33.

IV.

KEEP THOU MY FEET.

IT is no doubt true to say that the monuments of Edinburgh are not all beautiful and impressive, not always very successful. But there is one of the most recent which, I am sure, we are all glad to have and glad to look at as we pass along the busy pavement of Princes Street. Among the city's monuments there is nothing more striking than the figure of the mounted soldier, the trooper of the Scots Greys, set high up on its piece of rock. When you stand beneath it and look up and have it against the sky, so clear-cut, so vivid—the horse and his rider so full of keen, alert, living energy—is it not impressive as the type of something very capable and efficient, swift and sure? It makes a good picture for us as we pass—that figure alert and strong, with not a feeble line in it, nothing slack or uncertain, but there on its high place, firm-footed and watchful and ready.

There is something like this in the text. Here is a picture suggestive too as it might be seen often among the hills of Palestine. Far up on the rocks against the skyline see the deer. See this creature,

nimble and strong, so clear against the light, set there in lofty, dizzy places yet sure-footed and safe. It gives the Psalmist language for his song. He sees there the picture of himself in the critical occasions and dangerous circumstances of his life, and the picture of how he had been kept and helped by God. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places."

The Old Testament, like all great literature, is full of pictures. This is the charm of its poetry. It appeals to the imagination, throwing upon the screen one figure after another, one scene after another. As we turn the pages, how the pictures pass! Here in this verse in two lines of poetry we have this little picture like a vignette. You can see how it might be painted as an illustration on the margin of the page—this little vignette of the deer so slender and graceful, yet so strong and sure, the deer in sharp outline against the sky, far up among the crags, just on the line against the light. And the Psalmist sees himself in the hour of peril and God's preserving grace. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, He setteth me upon my high places."

The Hebrew poets often refer to the deer—its slender but powerful build, the swiftness and sureness of its movements. It is the common simile in Hebrew poetry for the warriors of Israel. We come upon it again and again. Of the three sons of Zeruiah, Asahel, we read, was "as light of foot as a wild roe." The men of the tribe of Gad who followed David had

faces "like the faces of lions, and they were swift as the roes upon the mountains." The men of Naphtali were like "hinds let loose," so bold and swift; and the same soldiers of the same gallant tribe were sung by Deborah because they "jeoparded their lives on the high places of the field." This creature light-footed, sure-footed, at home on the mountain-heights, nimble and strong and safe among the crags—this is the chosen emblem of the soldier.

We can understand this when we think of the nature of the country to which this Psalm refers. It refers, no doubt, to the hill-country of Judea, the Western Borderland that made a great barrier against the Philistines. It was penetrated by a number of defiles, deep, narrow valleys with steep, often precipitous sides, frequently with no path save the rough torrent-bed. Such a land of mountain and valley, steep hill-sides and lofty crags—that was the kind of country David knew in the time of peril when Saul hunted him like a partridge, and in his guerilla warfare against the Philistines. And in such a country you can see what kind of troops were needed, mobile troops, light and swift and sure-footed. "Everything conspires," says Dr. George Adam Smith, "to give the few inhabitants easy means of defence against large armies. It is a country of ambushes, entanglements, surprises, where large armies have no room to fight, and the defenders can remain hidden, where the essentials for war are nimbleness and the sure foot, the power

of scramble and of rush. We see it all in the Eighteenth Psalm—'By Thee do I run through a troop; and by my God do I leap over a wall: He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places: Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped.'"

Now, there are lessons for life in this little picture. It may speak to us of *safety*. The high places are the safe places. They are far from peril. The deer is gone where hunter and hound cannot follow. This is its best defence—it can flee to the safe crags.

"Like hinds," the text says, that bound upward. When they are scared by alarms below, they can flee fearless to their native rocks, springing from height to height; and at last they show themselves on some high peak; and standing on the rock they look down on the whole world below their feet—they look down on their baffled pursuers from the giddy heights where hunter and hound cannot follow. They are at home up there, able to keep their footing on cliff and precipice, and tossing their antlers in the free air. See the picture on the sky-line—the high places are the safe places.

Have we learned how true it is in life that the high places are the safe places? Like the deer we come into danger when we venture down to lower levels; and when we are scared by alarms and temptations and perils, this is our safety—to flee to the high places. Have we learned how true it is in

many things—in our reading, in our friendships, in our thoughts and aims? Decline from the best, and you lead yourself into temptation. Keep to the best books and the best friends and the best thoughts, and you are safe. "Seek the things that are above." Excelsior! Bid your spirit rise! There are dangers that beset us when we let down the level of our thoughts and of our life.

It is true, especially of the life of prayer and communion with God and fellowship with Christ. That is our higher life, and it is open for us every day. We may retreat there—to the Rock that is higher, to God who is our Refuge and Strength. Even in the busiest life, when the heart is lifted up to God, when the inner life is in communion with Christ, and the thoughts He gives and the spirit He breathes upon us, it takes us out of the reach of temptation. We are safe, for "He setteth me upon my high places."

Or we may think of the *swiftness*. It is a picture of bounding energy. It speaks of the freshness and the buoyancy of life, the power and confidence, the exhilaration and the joy in action. The hind is so nimble and swift and free.

This is no doubt what is meant when this figure is applied to the tribe of Naphtali. When Jacob, on his deathbed, blessed his sons, this is what he said—"Naphtali is a hind let loose," a bounding

stag. The meaning is no doubt this. When the Land of Promise was divided, the lot of Naphtali fell upon the highlands of Galilee ; and on these broad heights, open to the sunshine and the breeze, life is free and exhilarating ; and this beautiful figure of the "hind let loose" expresses "the feelings of exhilaration and abundant life which are bred by the health, the spaciousness, the high freedom, and the glorious outlook of Upper Galilee"—such life as you taste when you get away from the city to the mountains.

Of course the stag in all languages, in all literature, to all people who have ever seen it, is the very type and emblem of elastic springing ease, of light and bounding gracefulness, that clears every obstacle and sweeps swiftly over mountain and moorland. You see it on the skyline, and at a wave of your hand it is miles away—so swift and free !

"Like hinds' feet," the Psalm says. Ah ! but what a contrast this is to the way in which most of us get through our day's work. How we live our life, not on the high places but down in the valley ! We do not bound lightly onward, but plod, plod in a heavy-footed and spiritless way. Life is different, we say, in its drudgery, its monotony of tedious, trivial things ; and we are often down-spirited, with little energy for the steep places. And as the days go on, our buoyancy seems to diminish, and there is less spring in our step, less of a song in the heart, more of weariness on the brow. But read the text.

"Like hinds' feet" bounding swiftly to the high places, like that life of exhilaration and delight on the uplands—so we may run the race that is set before us.

It is the lesson of the New Testament too. We have it again and again in St. Paul's letters in the figure of the Christian athlete, the Christian runner and soldier. Not feeble, sluggish, heavy-footed ; not dull and weary and slow—that is not the Christian's life as the Apostle taught it or lived it. Spite of all the burdens and the hindrances, it is possible to rejoice in your work. You may cheerfully welcome every duty and triumph over every task. You may go about your work and get through it, not as a reluctant drudgery, but as a real delight. It is possible because Christ is an inspiration, because the life that Christ gives does really bring to men a vigour and a freshness and a buoyancy they did not know before.

This is the good of Christianity. This is the practical blessing of the Christian faith. It is an inspiration ; it means life abundantly. Christ gives us new thoughts about our work and what it may be. He brings to bear on all our work new motives which redeem it from being burdensome and tedious. He changes the drudgery, the plod, the grind to something glad and free. Did He not say to His disciples—"That My joy may be in you"? It was the joy of the worker. How He worked! How He enjoyed His work! Oh, the difference in life when "He

maketh my feet like hinds' feet," and sets me singing and "rejoicing as a strong man to run a race!"

Or we may think of the *sureness*. Not only light of foot but sure of foot. On that giddy height the deer is at home, firm and confident in its footing on cliff and precipice.

Fancy yourself up there on that giddy height! You say that you have not a strong head. Your head would begin to swim, and your feet to totter, and your knees to sink. But that graceful creature is as safe and confident on the edge of the cliff, or leaping from crag to crag, as if there were no danger at all, swift yet sure in the most difficult places. You covet such firm-footedness because you are conscious of your own weakness, and because you know that a stumble there on the high places would be disastrous. At once we feel that this, too, is like life; and this is our prayer—"Keep Thou my feet"; and this is the promise—"He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me, maketh me to stand, on my high places."

You may find for the text many applications in life. It is true of kings and governors and statesmen. They stand on the high places, and a fall there is disastrous—a hasty word, an outburst of temper, a lack of dignity or self-restraint, a blazing indiscretion. It is true of the high places in the Kingdom of God, of those called to be leaders and teachers. What means it to fill such conspicuous

places, to live there and speak and act so that no harm may ever come to the cause they represent! "Who is sufficient for these things?" Could any man ever venture but for his faith in God, who promises to keep him in such high places?

It may be true of yourself, when you are asked to take responsible office in the Church, to step up to some place of influence and opportunity, to take some part in Christian service. You shrink from it, saying, "How can I stand there in that conspicuous place with many eyes upon me, where a finer temper and behaviour will be expected from me than will pass in the world's crowded places, where I must live by a higher standard of Christian devotion and liberality and zeal? When you shrink from it, the text should encourage you in the confidence which David had, as he remembered how God had helped him in the most difficult days of his life.

Indeed, it is a word for any of us who are shrinking from a definite profession of Christian faith, from coming to the Lord's Table, from declaring plainly that we are the disciples of Christ. What does it mean, we say, and how can I live up to it? What will it call for day by day in the strain of life and temptation if I am to be faithful to my promise? I sympathise with you—I respect you for this—that you are not thinking lightly of what it means to make a profession of Christianity, that you are not pitching low your thoughts of what a Christian life should be. Yet surely it is ours to trust in God who

will not fail us. If we begin with a sincere heart He will be with us. When we venture out into that great and lofty life under the spell of Christian ideals to meet its experiences and advance to its attainments, this is the promise—Venture up to the high places and He will keep you there.

You may apply it to the high places of worldly position or prosperity. Very testing for some men is the sudden rise to high place or to great wealth. We say that it is not easy to carry a full cup, it is not easy to keep a steady head. Many a man stumbles there. Never does a man need to pray more for the grace of God than when he is prospering greatly and when wealth is flowing in upon him.

You may apply it to the high places of influence that come to us all, as fathers and mothers, teachers, masters. When other lives are under the power of our example, when our principles in life and our spirit will count for much in guiding others for good or evil, when we are set in such high places, how much depends on our stedfastness to truth and duty, our consistency as Christian men and women! How disastrous the slips and stumbles we may make! Do we not need this faith in God who will keep our feet?

You may apply it to the high places of experience when the best things in life come to us, things that lift a man up nearer to God. There are visions; on the mountains you see more clearly. There are hours of faith when unseen things, eternal things,

are very near and very real. There are hours when the grand ideals of life are shining before you, and the Christian man has a vision of what he yet may be. And you must live up to this. You must venture out into life with that vision, and He will keep your feet.

"My high places." What does that mean for you and me? My experiences, my highest hours of faith, of vision, of hope, of work, of duty, of prayer. "My high places"—what is it to live there? What is it to walk there? "Keep Thou my feet.'

Think of the Psalmist's picture. See the deer high on its dizzy crag against the skyline. God, who gives to His dumb creature the surefootedness it needs, will not fail to give His children the strength that will sustain them. He will keep you safe in the high places to which He calls you. You will find grace in Christ who said—"Lo, I am with you alway; My grace is sufficient for thee." And you may often hearten yourself by remembering this little vignette on the margin of the Psalter, this illustration from the mountains, as you say, looking up—

> "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet,
> He maketh me to stand upon my high places."

V.

HAUNTING VOICES.

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."—GENESIS iii. 8.

V.

HAUNTING VOICES.

ADAM and his wife heard the voice of the Lord God; and they hid themselves. They heard and hid themselves; and hiding they still heard. Though they hid themselves, they could not but hear. The Garden was still haunted by the great presence: and along its paths there came the voice, the sound that tells that someone is approaching. In the hush of eventide hear the rustle of the parted leaves and the sounding step of God as He comes—"The voice of the Lord God walking." Yes, though they hid themselves they heard; they could not but hear.

Now we can understand this very well: and this is the thought of the text.

Though our first parents when they sinned lost so much, they did not lose this—the voice of God was in their ears, haunting the Garden and haunting their life. Ah! there are haunted gardens, haunted houses: there are rooms you cannot enter without the sense of a vanished presence and the sounding of a voice that has long been still. There are fields

where you cannot wander, and shady corners in lovely gardens where you cannot sit, without waking old voices. We have lost a great deal—but we never lose this.

So this first man and woman had lost much—lost the old happy life. The guilty pair who lurked tremblingly among the trees of Eden, within the screen and shade of thick leaves, had once walked familiarly with God, confident and childlike, without shame and without fear. But now an immense spiritual distance intervened between the creature and the Creator. All the old intimacy was over. Man was a child no longer; and God was changed and far away and fearful. Still, far as he had fallen from his place in the Divine friendship, man was not beyond the sound of the Divine voice. If his soul had sinned, his ears were not deafened to the heavenly tones; and still "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

There is something here that is true, not of religion only, but of life. We may be parted from many things in life—from old places and persons and experiences. Still we are not done with them. There are voices that come to us and speak to us from all that has ever been.

We are separated from many things—it may be by force of circumstances: it may be by our own fault. Many ways the changes come: and old scenes are left behind; old companions drop out of sight;

dear presences vanish. Some of the things we lose are very dear and very precious. The love of a parent or a friend, the inspiration of a great teacher, the soul-moving power of some great experience—these have been with us and they have gone from us. Still, however far we may drift from our past, we never lose our memories. We never lose the capacity of being affected by the power of that which we once knew; and when the influences of former things come upon us, how they touch and thrill the heart! The voices out of the past may be wailing and complaining; they may come to us with a wistful sadness of regret. Or they may be inspiring and heart-stirring, bracing us for work and conflict. But we always hear them. Even in the densest shades of life they come to us, and speak to us. In the stillest hour these voices are not still.

Think of your own life. You had your early days—in the country perhaps. You remember the village and the cottage, the kirk and the school, the simple ways, the strong character, the influences about you then. You are far from it now—you have lost it; and yet, now that you are out in another world, come there not from that old quiet world voices that speak to you—voices that will haunt your path as long as you live?

Or take it the other way. Think of the man who has spent his days in the thick of the world's battle and business, and who passes into retirement for the evening of life. He has left it all. But in many

a still hour come there not voices from the world he has left? In vivid memory its experiences crowd upon him still.

You know that it often happened in days long gone by, that men who had played a great part in the world, soldiers and statesmen, even emperors and kings, at last laid all aside for the cloister and the cell. And think you that the monk has forgotten the world he has left? In the strange unearthly stillness and coldness of the monastery does he forget the days of youth and the joys of living, and the ties that bound him dearly to others, and the glad and strenuous share he had in the world's work and war, and all the fulness of its life? Does he never look again into love-lighted eyes, or feel the warm clasp of a strong hand? Does he hear no voices coming through the cloisters and along the corridors of life?

Ah! it is not so. Take yourself where you please; hide yourself where you may—you cannot forget. Still the power of what has been is upon you. In our Garden the very air is quivering with voices that come through the rustling leaves and along its dim pathways; and our house is haunted by ghostly presences. We meet them at every turn we take; even as "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

Now, what the text does is to apply this truth about life to its highest and holiest experience.

There is profound spiritual truth beneath all the simplicity of this chapter. It tells us that the ideal life, and so the first life, is this—when God dwells with man and walks with him and speaks with him, when man does not fear God and has no cause to fear Him, but walks like a happy child with God through the pleasant places. And it tells us that even when we fall from this first life, when its happiness is broken, whatever takes us away from it or comes between us and God, He does not cease to be an encompassing presence to us and a voice living and often loud. We hear still the sound of His coming through all the screens we make to hide us; and we know and feel that He is near.

This is the lesson—God once known can never pass out of human life. You may fall into scepticism or into sin. You may lose your innocence or lose your faith. You may give up praying as you used to pray. You may lose your old childlike trust in God. You may take yourself away and try to hide yourself from Him. But you cannot help hearing the voice of the Lord God still walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

Why, this world is like that Garden—possessed by God, haunted, inhabited by Him. It is His world, for He made it: and He has never left it. He fills every corner of it; He fills all places with His presence. And life is like that Garden. Try all its paths, and you meet God; you cannot escape

from Him. No matter how you fall away from Him or try to forget Him, He will not let you go. And the thought of God, once it is fastened in the soul, never leaves it. If ever you knew God, something will remind you that He is still near. His is the Presence that cannot be eluded and the Voice that will not be still. "Thou hast beset me behind and before: whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?"

This is what we find in the text. This man and this woman who once knew God heard His voice even after they had disobeyed Him—heard Him when they were hiding from Him. For God will not suffer the man who has known Him and sinned against Him and gone away from Him—God will not suffer that man to be at ease and forget Him. Plunge into scepticism or self-indulgence or sin; try to escape and hide and forget; still through all the screens of unbelief and sin there comes that pleading voice. For no man is more busy in ruining himself than God is busy to save him; and no man is more careful to hide himself away from the face of his Maker than God is watchful to awaken and win him back. And so the place of our life, like that Garden, is haunted by His presence: and God comes to us along every path, comes to us in spite of ourselves. We are beset by His approaches and appeals and all the wonder of His seeking love.

Does it not explain experience? Is it not the meaning of many things in life? This is God

suggesting Himself, reminding us that He is very near. Some early and simple religious teaching long forgotten—you thought you had outgrown it, left it far behind; but it returns to your memory and moves you strangely, and you are almost on your knees. Some cadence of an old hymn: some text: some great lesson of God and Christ and Heaven. Or there are times when you are overcome by sudden emotion, or carried away in some train of thought that you cannot explain. The melting mood, the strange reverie—whence comes it? It subdues and softens you, and makes you think of better things. Some event in your life—a great danger, a great trouble overhanging you, a great sorrow—some event brings you face to face with the Unseen Power that rules all things, and rules your life and whom you cannot escape. Or, most of all, in the stirrings and strivings of Conscience, the sense of guilt and all the anxiety that comes to earnest men as they look upon their life He lays His hand upon you.

God is very near; and in many ways He makes Himself heard. He never leaves the garden where once He walked. He never leaves the life where once He has been known. If God had ever a real place in your life, He will return. Once let God be known, once let religion have any power over you—you may lose it and forget it and hide away from it, but somehow it will assert itself again, and take hold of you like a pleading voice. You may go away

from what you have been—away to the far country, if you will: but in the farthest distance and the deepest darkness you will wake to hear that voice again.

Not the first man only, but every man since who once knew God and then lost Him, who once prayed and then ceased to pray, who once walked like a child with his Father and then forsook the home of his soul, is visited by the conviction that he is not left to himself. There is Another seeking him still; and he hears again the voice in the garden in the cool of the day.

And notice that this was the time when God appeared—"in the cool of the day."

Literally "at the wind of the day"—when it was evening and the air was cool, when the evening breeze springs up, and comes playing, rustling, whispering among the leaves. At eventide when the sun is setting and the land is still, when the shadows gather, when the lights are dim, and the noises are quiet, and the heart of man is hushed—we know the restful, reverent, pensive mood that comes in that still hour.

Everything in this old story has a meaning: and we know how much this means—the influence of eventide, the twilight, the time between the light and the darkness. Then we hear the voices we cannot hear when our work fills our hands and occupies our thoughts, when we are distracted and

excited, when the noise and the tumult of the world drown the higher voices. But at evening we are released and hushed and subdued—restful, thoughtful, sensitive. Some deeper consciousness seems to awake, and memory brings forth its treasures, and all the past becomes so near, and we seem to feel the touch of vanished hands, and hear the sound of the voices that are still.

And in that hushed and solemn hour it is our better self that wakes—not the bad but the better,—all that is finest in our spiritual experience, all that is holiest, heavenliest. God is never so near, and we are never so susceptible, so spiritually sensitive, so conscious of His presence.

We may believe that God will make such a time for you and me. He will bring us to an hour when the conditions will help us like the hush of evening, when the fever and strife are quiet, and the forgetfulness and sin are past, and we hear God. It may come in the time you have to spend in a sick room—in the long days and weary nights. It may come on a journey, in a strange city, when you feel so lonely and far from home. It may come in a time of holiday—among the mountains or beside the sea. It may come in some great sorrow, when your heart is hushed, and when you are alive to the unseen as never before.

Yes, God will make for you and me such a time, like the cool of the day, quiet and solemn and wistful and ready for His revealings. God will bring

that time, and you cannot escape it. Then God calls you to Himself.

What God will say to you, I cannot tell. What God has to say we must hear each for himself. But what we need to remember is this—that everything depends on how we take it, how we act when we hear the voice of God. They heard His voice; and they hid themselves; and hiding they heard again. Would they stay in the shadow, ashamed and afraid? Or would they go out to meet Him?

Surely this is what we must do. When God calls, let us meet Him in the open, hiding nothing. Hear the voice of the Lord God and go out to meet Him; and His word will be merciful, whatever it appoints for you.

Where do we hear the voice of God as we hear it in Christ? We hear Him best in the tender tones of the Son of man who walked this world, and whose voice ever since has haunted this earth of ours as it haunts your life and mine. The Christ of God with His words of grace and Gospel, of invitation and pardon and promise—these are the words of God if Divine words were ever heard by men. When Jesus Christ and His Gospel touch our hearts, it is the voice of God that speaks. It is a voice Divine in depth of meaning and tenderness and pleading power. "Hear Him."

To hear the voice of the Son of God is to live. It is to enter into life and peace. Hear what Christ

has to say of God from God to you. Listen and learn, and know and believe, and do His will. And the voice will lead you onward and upward, and make your life in all its varied steps a humble walk with God. And it will bring you at last to the Tree of life, beside the river in the Eternal Eden—the Paradise of the Sons of God.

VI.

IN FEAR OF SPIRITUAL DEATH.

"And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."—PSALM li. 11.

VI.

IN FEAR OF SPIRITUAL DEATH.

THERE is a special meaning in this word if we take the Psalmist to be David. Then it is the King who speaks, the Lord's Anointed, the man upon whose young head there had been poured the oil which set him apart to his high office, and which was the symbol, in its gentle flow and sweet fragrance, of the gift and inspiration of a Divine influence. Look back to that great day when Samuel came to the house of Jesse, and the holy oil was on David's fair head. Could that gift be forfeited, taken back, lost? "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Think, too, what David had seen in his predecessor. Saul, the gallant youth, was chosen by God, but after a while he fell. For his disobedience and his impenitence we read this solemn word about him—"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul." And his life ends in dark tragic events, gloomy and God-forsaken. David looks back to that great sad figure, remembered so well and loved by him so truly. He sees in the blasted, ruined life of Saul the picture of what may come to him, if the blessing laid on his young head by Samuel's anointing should pass from

him too. Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers that dark sad fate, prays—"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Think, too, of what had happened; think of David the sinful man. If this is his penitence and his prayer after he had fallen so shamefully, can we wonder at such fear that God might forsake him? This is the holy fear of the man who has his eyes open to the depth and iniquity of sin, fear lest at any moment he should be left without the succour of that Divine Spirit who was the source in him of all that was good. It is the cry of one who knows, as he never knew before, the weakness of his own nature, and the strength of temptation, and the need of Divine help, and to whom nothing therefore seems so dreadful as that God should withdraw His Spirit. So, rising in his penitence and prayer, he wrestles with God and stays the heavenly Visitant when his sin has made it seem as if He would depart. "I will not let Thee go." There can be nothing so dreadful as His departing, nothing so desirable as His abiding. Therefore all our fears and all our desires should shape themselves into this prayer—"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Of course, we are not to think that the Psalmist had knowledge of the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit. But there is, even in the Old Testament, a wonderful meaning in this word,

God's Spirit. The Spirit in the Old Testament is always coming upon men for all kinds of work—kings to rule, prophets to preach, singers to sing, warriors to fight, judges to judge, builders and artists to fashion their beautiful fabrics, as well as priests to pray and sacrifice. The whole of life is governed and guided to successful issues by the coming of the Divine Spirit. And especially this is true of the spiritual life. In all the better, higher life that raises men to God, it is the Spirit that makes such life possible.

Can we not accept this as a great truth—that the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts, working to all good?

Is it not true that a Divine power works in the artist, the poet, the thinker, the speaker? There is himself, and there is more than himself. There is also some mysterious energy that takes possession of him. He becomes the instrument of the Spirit of Beauty or Truth or Love. The greatest can never tell how they do the greatest things. We call it genius, inspiration. The men who deliver the great orations, who sing the immortal songs, who write the epoch-making books, who create the marvels of beauty—they cannot tell how it all came to pass. In the best of anything and everything there is an element of mystery.

Must it not be specially true concerning character? Of the greatest in moral action we must confess this.

even up to Christ Himself. The Spirit of God descended and rested on the fairest, purest, sweetest souls and led them in life. All greatness of mind and heart, all purity of spirit, all strength and tenderness, all faith and charity, all courage and hope—you say, Whence is all this? There is but one answer, but one explanation of all this glorious goodness. It is the eternal Spirit. There are impulses in life, inspirations, forces of which we say—"This is God; this is the Spirit of God."

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone."

All the religious emotions and religious vitality of man, all the endowments which we call "spiritual," are said to be due to the Spirit of God. Here the Psalmist's prayer, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me," is, as Dr. A. B. Davidson has said, "almost equal to a prayer that his mind may not cease to be religious, to have thoughts of God and aspirations towards God."

Think of it—"may not cease to be religious." The very thought of God would go from us if we should lose this Spirit. God would cease to be a reality to us; prayer would be a vain thing; worship, communion, trust, obedience—all become impossible when God is gone from our life. It is the Holy Spirit that quickens the human spirit to strive after God; and

the taking away of the Spirit would leave the soul without anything of all this, without religion.

The Psalmist, by his prayer, seems to imply that he felt himself on the brink of that abyss—a life without God. His sin seemed to carry in it the possibility of this. Have you ever been where the Psalmist was at that alarming moment? Have you ever feared thus for yourself—that you would cease to be religious? Indeed, what this man was really afraid of, was that he would no longer wish to be religious—that he would no longer have any Divine impulse, emotion, aspiration. He would lose the sense of God, the capacity for God, the caring for God, and sink to a life how much or how little above the animal! To lose the Spirit would be to lose everything, and in the long run to be left without God in the world.

The Psalmist comes to the brink of it. And do we not come to the very worst when we call a man God-forsaken? Can it ever be? Is it a danger we need to fear—when the Spirit ceases to strive and move within us, and the Divine withdraws, and we are left content without these higher things? They no longer appeal to us or influence us. We do not feel them. We are totally past that; and when other men speak of them they waken no quiver of responsive feeling in us.

I say, is there such a state—God-forsaken? If there is, how we should fear it! Is it possible that we should come to that? The Psalmist had a glimpse

of what it meant, and shrank in terror from it, and cried, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Is there not much in our own experience which tells us what a present peril this really is? You hardly need words of mine to tell you that these, our inward endowments, are precarious and easily lost. How easy it is to have one's feelings blunted and one's heart hardened! How easy to lose early faiths, early ideals! How swiftly and how soon our bright visions fade! How readily our finer sensibilities lose their edge, and our higher ambitions their power!

There are certain things which you sought earnestly once, but for which you no more look, because you have ceased to care for them. You have perhaps succeeded in life in a worldly way; but you have lost the heart you had. You cannot even read the books you used to read, or enjoy the society that once was a help to you. Once you knew what religious emotion is, and devout worship, and prayer, and the thought of Christ and His love, and the passion of Christ to save and bless. You knew that, but you do not know it now. Your religion has little strength, your Christian profession little vitality or force. Hours come when you almost smile cynically at the dreams and ideas and emotions of your former self. Was I ever really like that—a passionate youth, man of the world as I am to-day?

Ah! the holier spirits of life are fleeting things;

and they spread their wings and flee away from us. If they are not cherished, they will not stay. How often you have watched the fading out from human lives of the brighter hopes, the finer feelings, the better desires! An hour comes when the word must be spoken of the gift of heaven unused—"Take therefore the talent from him." And there is no prayer which should more than this be on our lips continually—"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

How is it that we lose the Holy Spirit? Surely we must say that we bring this loss upon ourselves—by our neglect or by our disobedience. How does God take the Spirit from us? In the same way as He takes from us anything that is not used, not valued, not loved and cherished.

There are words in the New Testament which warn us not to quench the Spirit. For there is a human side and a Divine side to all such experience. Pharaoh hardened his own heart, although we read also that God hardened it. And we resist and grieve and quench the Spirit before that Spirit is taken from us. God takes away what we have shown most certainly that we do not want.

Now, think of some of the ways in which the Divine Spirit in us may be lost. Let me mention two.

There is the secular temper. I do not say the sensual, the lust of the flesh, though that is deadly.

Thoughts and broodings and dreamings and desires after foul forbidden things—the Spirit of God dwells not with these. But secular things — material interests and gains and goods.

Why, even the poet or the painter may be spoilt by sordid thoughts. He can hardly keep his genius if he sets his heart on money. Where are the pictures and the poems after that? And the great thinker and teacher of his generation—can you fancy him a man greedy and covetous, greatly concerned about his material interests and gains? Even the intellectual life demands a certain detachment from such concerns, a certain indifference to sordid considerations, a constant sacrifice of worldly pleasure and gain. And this is far more necessary in all who would live the highest life. The Spirit is lost by the love of the world. Thousands destroy and lose the best inspirations of the soul by a consuming concern about material things.

We all know the spirit of the world that so besets us—the hard, matter-of-fact world which says—"Take the visible tangible realities, and live among these, and enjoy these, and don't dream. There is no room in the real business of the world for the visionary and the dreamer—a world which walks by sight, not by faith." And one must say very earnestly, especially to young people entering on life—"Oh, you must be watchful, prayerful, earnest about the cultivation of the higher side of your being. You will find people ready to laugh at your

faith, your Christian ideals, your belief in prayer, your finer emotions. You will be told that there is no place in the world for such things as these; and you may become infected by the hard spirit and the maxims and the ways of blinded men. You may cease the pursuit of Christlike character, and become careless about the things of the religious life. Your feelings may become deadened, your early beliefs forgotten, your once fair imaginations clouded over, and your soul hardened and chilled."

The risk is real—I have seen it; I know what I say. I have seen men begin life with a very genuine feeling for Christ and the Christian life, with lofty thoughts of how they might serve Him, and a heart that was warm with love to Him and love to men. And I have seen them, because of worldliness, because their interest passed so completely to secular things—I have seen them sink and lose so much of their very best. Is there any worldly success that can make up for such a loss? "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

And there is great danger from our indolence—from a slothful temper that is not quick to obey the Spirit within us, that resists and disobeys.

Remember, it is at our peril that we suppress any impulse to good, any urgency within. There is more than myself in me—I feel it—deeper than my own thoughts, there is an influence that seems to press me, and which I can obey or disobey. We are

prompted by the Spirit of God to speak, to work, to pray, to aspire to a higher, holier life. Let that Spirit have free course; let it out into exercise and expression. Speak the word that the Spirit gives. Do the deed to which He prompts. Follow the higher path to which He points. Be obedient; be ready; be quick to take advantage of every good impulse. Otherwise you quench and lose the Spirit.

Spirit of Truth—What is it to be obedient—truth-loving? Spirit of Holiness—What is it to be obedient? In the conscience He speaks, in the whispers and drawings, the rebukes and restrainings. Spirit of Love—What is it to be obedient? There come impulses of pity, kindness, generosity, sympathy, love. It is the Divine Spirit—for love is of God. Spirit of God—What is it to be obedient? What do those moments mean when we are conscious that God is very near, when we feel the higher possibilities of our nature and our life, and are constrained to say, "Now are we the sons of God"? Then to be obedient to the heavenly vision, to have courage to live up to this, or to turn from it and fall away and forget God and prayer!

Oh, it is a very practical thing. We lose God's gifts by indolence and disobedience, so that really we refuse them before we lose them. God takes the Spirit from us when we have shown, by resisting and disobeying, how little we really value His presence.

The Psalmist thought thus about himself. He thought of God as near—not far away but ever near,

a quickening Spirit. "In Him we live and move and have our being." Everything in us that is good, all suggestions and impulses, all are the movements and the signs of the indwelling, inspiring Spirit of God. How we should reverence ourselves, the Temples of the Holy Spirit, and fear lest the Temple should be deserted, lest for any sin of ours the Spirit of God should forsake us! The Psalmist had sinned greatly, and he might well have been in fear of Hell —just of Hell. But he feared rather to lose God, to lose God's Spirit, to lose his religious life.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost." This is our consolation and hope, and this is our fear. Everything is ours if the Spirit is ours. All is lost if the Spirit is gone—if by neglect or disobedience we drive Him from our breast.

"O God, make clean our hearts within us:
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from us."

VII.

THE CRY FOR SYMPATHY.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."—LAMENTATIONS i. 12.

VII.

THE CRY FOR SYMPATHY.

I REMEMBER, on my first visit to Switzerland years ago, coming upon this text, as you meet it often in the Catholic countries of the Continent. Passing through one of the beautiful Swiss valleys, up the steep path and along the mountain-side, one comes upon a little recess, a covered place by the wayside, with a Crucifix in it, and underneath it this inscription—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." You can fancy how striking it is —there, in the midst of all the glory and the gladness of God's fair earth, is the symbol of shame and suffering and sorrow. To turn from the smiling beauty of Nature to this sorrowful mystery of grace, from the gladness of the living world to this picture of agony and death! As men are passing by, up and down the mountain path, here is the call to turn aside and think and pray. "Jesus our Lord was crucified."

Is not the Sacrament to us like that Crucifix by the wayside in the midst of a glad and lovely world? Once and again we come upon it—the Lord's Supper

—and we are arrested by it. We cannot hurry on heedlessly when we have looked on this strange, sad sight. What does it mean? The bread broken and the red wine running into the cup—Ah! the Body and the Blood! We do not need the Crucifix when we have Christ's own reminder. We need no other image than this simple symbol in the Sacrament, speaking to us of sorrow and love as nothing else can. And as men are passing by, bent on business or pleasure, here is the call to turn aside and meditate and mourn awhile. Here is the little resting-place beside the mountain-path, the little sanctuary by the wayside, where we look on Him who was pierced. In the midst of our busy, gladsome life, God sets among us this symbol of exceeding sorrow. We, too, are confronted by the Cross—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

Of course the text, as we find it here, does not refer to the sufferings of Christ. Still, there is a kind of inevitable association when we remember Him and His sorrow, so pre-eminent among sorrows, and so despised and forgotten. But there is another reference here, and another lesson before we apply it to Him.

First, it refers to Judah and Jerusalem. This Book of Lamentations is a book of five poems, five dirges, five laments, over the desolation of the Holy

City. The first, in the first chapter, gives us a picture of the distress of Jerusalem after its siege by the Assyrians. The city is pictured as a widowed and discrowned princess, a widow bereft of her children, sitting solitary in the night, weeping sorely. It is the utter lonesomeness of the city that is so vividly presented, the streets without traffic, the tenantless houses, emptied of all the stir and tumult of life; and in this desolation she sits, helpless and hopeless, abandoned to her memories and her despair. She sits, and the night comes, and still she sits. She does not stir. The tears come in the silent solitude of the night, and there is no one to wipe them away. What a picture in contrast with her past! She was not always a lonely widow, but a proud princess, a happy mother. So the poet speaks; and then the deserted city herself takes up the lamentation. It is here that the text comes in, when the dirge is taken up by the desolate daughter of Jerusalem. She begins with this heart-piercing cry to the thoughtless passers-by. This is her complaint against indifference. The solitary widow pleads for something more kindly and tender and sympathetic. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Is it not true of every sorrow that comes to press sorely on the human heart? This is a very common feeling and a common cry. How painfully we feel the awful indifference of the world! When your heart is breaking, the hearts of those about you seem

as light as ever. The world goes on, busy and merry, passing by your trouble and brushing it aside as if it were nothing. It is a strange feeling we sometimes have when we come out from the darkened room into the light of day—out from the sick-room into the street. See the bright, busy, noisy, laughing world, heedless of the man dying there. If you have ever come through a crushing bereavement, you know what I mean. How indifferent the great world seemed to your sorrow! You went out into the street, and there was no sign of mourning there. The movement and the mirth did not rest for a moment because you were sad, and the noise seemed harsh and pitiless; and the songs and the laughter made your heart feel heavier and lonelier than ever; and you were inclined to protest against this unresting business; you wanted to protest even against the happiness of other people. You wanted to say, "Stop for a moment and think of me and feel my sorrow." How true it is of every heavy trial when we feel the weight of it, and see the world not feeling it at all! "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

But there is another thought here. You may turn the text round against yourself. The cry is not your own but another's. It is not my complaint against the cold world, but the complaint of another against me. For this is what life is like—an endless procession along the great highway; and there

are always those who sit apart in sorrow and those who pass heedlessly by. Perhaps sometimes you have been flung aside out of the movement and the march of life, compelled to sit still with your sickness or your sorrow; and often, as you sat by the wayside and the crowds went drifting past, you wondered how many knew or cared about your trouble, and the thought rose in your heart—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" But mostly we are ourselves in the rush of the traffic of the world; and when we are engrossed in our own errands and pursuits, how little we are aware of what is happening beside us? We pass with a hurried glance the house in which the blinds are drawn; we take only a fleeting look at the funeral procession as it moves through the streets; we get only a glimpse of the pale face at the window; and all these mean so much. Beside every step of the road of life there is need and suffering. We go past cares and sorrows, disappointments and bereavements, pain and sickness every hour of the day; and voices we do not hear are whispering as we go, "Is it nothing to you?"

In ordinary life men mostly know very little of each other and care very little. Every man for himself. Personal interests are so engrossing, and personal cares so pressing, that we see little of what goes on beyond the circle of our own immediate affairs. I daresay you have stood in some of the busiest places in London, on one of the

bridges, or at the corner of a street or the entrance to a railway-station. See the dense ceaseless procession of human beings like a flood flowing past. Perhaps your first thought was this—How many of these people know anything about the men and women who are on the bridge or the street beside them, and how many care whether the rest sorrow or sin or suffer? Drop into the stream, and how soon you are lost in it, swallowed up and swept away! And drop out of it again and you never would be missed. How few would notice that you had disappeared! Stand there feeling your littleness, your loneliness, with the burden of your own life, your sorrows and cares and loves and fears, and say, What is it all? What do I count for? "Is it nothing to you?"

Now surely this text is meant to remind us of this—that the human heart has a great craving for sympathy. This passage expresses a deep yearning for sympathy. It is a cry to anyone who is passing. Mere strangers, roving Bedouin, any people who may chance to be passing by Jerusalem are implored to look upon her desolation. Man is not like the wounded animal that will creep into a corner to suffer and die in secret. Among men the instinct of a sufferer is to crave sympathy—from a friend, if possible, but if that may not be, then even from a stranger. And we are not to say, "Oh, it is only sympathy!" It is the sympathy that is prized.

We hardly know how much it means sometimes—to be considered, thought about, not forgotten.

The heart has a great craving for sympathy ; and the heartlessness and the heedlessness of the hurrying world becomes at times crushing. If only some would come from the careless crowd and let us feel that we have the compassion of other human hearts, our trouble would not be so hard ; and the times come when we almost cry out against it, times when we see the face of one who comes with a word of compassion like the face of an angel.

Surely the lesson is not far to seek—that we should do our part to diminish the feeling of neglect, of indifference, to bridge the distance between those who sit by the wayside and those who pass by. Not that we can really make every distress we encounter our own, but we may learn to feel more, to be more ready to comfort, to speak a word in season to him that is weary. What we need is the sympathetic heart. Why, if there is any sorrow or trouble among those of your own kin or your own house, you cannot be blind to it, you cannot forget it, you bear the thought of it with you wherever you go ; and what the world needs is an immense expansion and extension of our sympathies. Larger hearts would make a sweeter life. If one has a heart that can be touched with a feeling of the infirmities of his fellows, he will have a keener eye for suffering and a readier hand. It will no longer be nothing to him—it will

be something to him that wistful, tearful eyes are looking out upon him from the wayside as he passes by.

Think of Christ and mark His ways. He was no lonely hermit, no dweller in the desert. His life led Him along the ways with men. He was found where men were busiest. He was ever "passing by." But "as He passed by," how keen His eyes were for those who sat by the wayside! Never a longing look cast towards Him remained unanswered; never a sight of suffering met His eyes which did not touch His heart and win His help. His sympathy was perfect. Yes, His sympathy was perfect. That made Him all He was.

And what can we ask for ourselves but more of His spirit in us—quick and sensitive and responsive? Opportunity will guide us for the rest, if His spirit is ours; and we shall learn that this is the secret of the happiest life. Not the happiness that comes from giving a wide berth to the sorrowful sights; not the kind of life that is a conspiracy, a contrivance to keep sorrow out of sight. No, it is strange, but it is true, that the happiest men and women in all the world are those who can share best and who do share most the sorrow of others. They love much. Your own burdens become lighter the more you share the burdens of other men. When the shadow of another's sorrow falls upon your heart, you forget your own. It is lost in the love. In the simple words of a great writer: "We can have the

highest happiness only by having wide thoughts and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as for ourselves." Wide thoughts and much feeling—yes, much feeling.

Then why do I bring in, as I did at the beginning, the sorrow of Christ? It is inevitable, for it is the Cross that teaches us this charity. It is the Cross that makes the hard heart break, and the proud heart melt. Here is the love that wakens love, and the sympathy and the sacrifice that is the death of selfishness. It is the Cross that marks the turning-point where the ways of man with man have been changed and softened and sweetened and made gracious and kindly; and we always come back to it—that first love.

The words have been taken as prophetic of the sufferings of Christ, but it is not so. They are not Messianic. It is not Jesus but Jerusalem who speaks here. All the same, when we read our text, we remember Him. Our thoughts go to the Cross reared on the hill beyond the city-wall and beside the highway; our thoughts go to the pale figure whose sorrow was as nothing to those who passed by. Inevitably we think of Christ. If ever anyone could say it, it was He. Never was there sorrow like His; and though it was the greatest and the grandest and the most fruitful of blessings to the world, never was there sorrow so despised.

There is no doubt that this is supreme among the

sorrows which the world has seen. Christ is pre-eminent in this strange dignity—the First of Sufferers; and "is it nothing to you and me?" "They that passed by reviled Him," and even those who were not so brutally heartless were heedless. They did not turn aside from business or from pleasure, but went on their way as if it were nothing; and still there are those who lightly let it go, who try to forget it, who pass by as if it were not there, who live as far as possible from Calvary and out of sight of the Cross. This is the amazement of the text, that such a sorrow should be here in the world and men should heed it not.

This is the sorrow it most concerns us to remember—the sorrow that saves the world: for what does it mean? It means this. It is the last expression of the sympathy, the compassion of God. He could not pass us by—could not forget us. He looked upon us, loved us, stooped to help us. In His love and pity He redeemed us.

This very chapter ends in an appeal to Heaven. When the passers-by are heedless, the stricken city turns from man to God for pity; and this is the message of the Cross. If your sorrow is nothing to those who pass by, it is something to God who is afflicted in all our afflictions. That figure of the Crucified is the embodiment of the seeking love of God, of His compassion humbling Himself, identifying Himself with the world's sorrow. It is the last expression of that Divine sympathy which stoops and

dies to save and bless. It is the refuge of the stricken-hearted, and the hope of the sin-laden and weary. Can you not see it as you read the Bible from the beginning? God is coming nearer and nearer, entering more deeply into the life of man, taking upon Himself ever more of his conflict and burden, till at last in Christ He is here beside us carrying on His heart our load of sorrow and of sin. Christ is not ashamed to be our Brother, suffering with us, suffering for us, repenting for us with a sorrow we could not give to God. No, He could not pass by. This is the Priest who never passes by, the heavenly Samaritan who stoops to bless us. It is the perfection of sympathy; and it saves.

When we truly know what it means, when we ourselves are saved by such a sympathy, it makes a difference, as we look upon our brothers. It cannot be denied that this story of the Cross has changed the world and the ways of men, as these have been softened and sweetened by thoughtful, tender sympathy. The charity of the Cross makes us charitable, and we love because He first loved.

God sets it before us again and again in Word and Sacrament. The centre of our faith is the Cross—the sorrow that saves the world. It is the sorrow it most concerns us to remember. I would not forget its immense meaning for the remission of sins, but I am reminding you now that it saves us only as it makes us like Him who loved

us and gave Himself for us. Beside that Cross, believing in that Christ, we cannot keep our pride and selfishness, or live any longer unto ourselves. "We must love Him, too, and love like Him and try His works to do."

To-day, let us think of it. Christ is long past His passion and now reigning in glory, and He does not ask our pity. "Weep not for Me." It is not for us to be wasting idle tears over the sufferings of His earthly life, or gazing at the Crucifix, or brooding morbidly over the wound-prints and the nail-prints and all the harrowing details of His agony. No, we know His mind and will, and we are safe to say that He would "rather see us give a cup of cold water to one of His brethren, than an ocean of tears to the memory of Calvary." The power of the Cross is not seen in ascetic devotion before the Crucifix, but in this—that we are quick to think of the miseries and sorrows of the men and women about us, quick to sympathise, and help them in the name of Christ.

We learn it here. The world will yet learn it here. "They passed by reviling." But "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Christ had the sublimest confidence in the triumph of the best, and the crowds who are passing by will yet come to Him, and learn this as we learn it—that untold pity and compassion and love which make the heart of man great and tender—that love and

pity which will yet soften all the hardness and end all the estrangement and neglect, and make all the world one family of God where men "bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

VIII.

THE CONDITION OF SERVICE.

"And I sat where they sat."—EZEKIEL iii. 15

VIII.

THE CONDITION OF SERVICE.

THERE is a verse in one of the later poets of the Roman Empire which is familiar and often quoted. Freely translated it runs: "I am a man, and I count nothing human foreign to me." I estrange myself, alienate myself, separate myself from nothing human.

The saying expresses concisely the spirit of service, the spirit of every man who, in devoted sympathy, aspires to do anything for man. If you are going to be of any use to your fellow-creatures, you must place yourself beside them, and in fellow-feeling, at least, share their thoughts, their experiences, and their lot. You must bear even the burden of their ignorance and weakness and sin. God's work in the world is done by the man who mingles with men as one of themselves. Ezekiel had something great to do for God among his captive fellow-countrymen; and this is the first step towards his task. The Spirit of God came mightily upon the young priest, impelling him to the mission of his life; and he begins it thus: "I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, and I sat where they sat."

You know how differently men are related to their fellow-men, in their thoughts about them. You know how differently they feel as they come into contact with the crowded world of men and women. And certainly, when you think of some of the great names, the powerful personalities, you know that the attitudes which they take to the masses of mankind are vastly different. There is love and sympathy and honour and yearning compassion, or there is contempt and depreciation, and hard, cruel speech. Think of Napoleon—think of David Livingstone. How notable the difference between such men in their thought and feeling to their fellow-men! According to the diverse character and spirit and purpose of their lives, so do men hold themselves towards other men.

There are cynics like Swift, who, from an altitude of assumed superiority, look in cold and curious contempt on the life beneath them, who expose human nature unsparingly in its meannesses and weaknesses, and lash it with the strokes of merciless satire to the accompaniment of a shrill laughter, the bitter mockery of which repels us. There are censors like Carlyle, and Ruskin, too, in much of his writing, who sit apart in lonely places, and thence deal out their judgments and threatenings in strong words.

But there are also those, writers and speakers and workers, who are beside the people. They could never be what they are if they were sitting apart and holding themselves aloof. Their place is in the heart of life, close by the side of men and women.

There are patriots, like Mazzini, who fling themselves into the stress of the human struggle for liberty, consumed by a passion for men, even while disappointed and saddened by the unworthiness of those they so nobly serve. There are poets, like Burns, who, from the midst of the people, sing for the people, giving voice to their common life in its joy and love and sorrow and longing, singing for them only because they have shared it all. There are philanthropists; there are social reformers; there are missionary heroes, who take their lives down into the crowded places of human want and misery and sin. They go in among the lives of men that they may save them, because they can only speak there, and work there, in the midst of the need they would alleviate, and the darkness they would change to light.

Yes, very different the attitude of men to their fellows. But it is for ever true that all worthy effort must have the same beginning, and have, from first to last, the animation and the inspiration of the same spirit. He who would truly help men must know men and be in touch with men, by going down into the midst of men as one of themselves. Thus the Spirit of God inspires and impels the souls whom He chooses like Ezekiel here. "So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat."

It happened to Ezekiel as it has happened to not a few men who have left their mark on the world. His career was not that which he had anticipated and marked out for himself. The force of divinely-ordered circumstances constrained him into other and different ways.

Ezekiel was, as we are told, of a priestly family, and therefore of high rank among his people. Probably he looked forward to the service of the priesthood as his life-work. But it was not so to be. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, Ezekiel was one of those who were carried captive to Babylon. His prospects were suddenly blighted, and his whole life altered. For five years after his exile we know and hear nothing of him. Then suddenly the Spirit of God fell upon Ezekiel, and he felt called, not to the priestly, but to the prophetic office. He was not to minister to the people from above them as a priest, but to minister among them as a prophet. No sooner did his burden fall upon him than he took his place. "I came to them of the captivity, and I sat where they sat;" and to the young prophet then the voice of the Lord came: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel."

Ezekiel was to be a prophet to the Exiles. That was the sphere in which he was to make proof of his ministry. To this exiled community he was sent. Among them lay his work. And first he must come to know them, their thoughts, their

burdens, their aspirations. So he lived among them, and the text puts it in this suggestive and memorable clause. Let us remember it—"I sat where they sat." This is where you find the prophet, the teacher, the pastor, the reformer, the helper, the Saviour. They can serve God to no good purpose anywhere else.

There are places in life where men sit together. Life has its well-defined spheres. Men gather into places, into quarters, into classes and societies. There are the places of the humble toilers; there are the places of the sunken and the poverty-stricken; there are the places of business; there are the high places apart where the thinkers are; and so on over the whole field of life. And whether they be great or humble, high or low, God's prophet and watchman must go to the place where the men and women whom he would serve wait for him, and must sit where they sit.

Or, if we take life from another viewpoint which is more important, we find that there are not only these places of varied circumstance and condition but also the places of experience. Human experiences are common and universal because they are human. Accidental differences drop out when you come to the world-old things of life. King and beggar, ploughman and nobleman, share these alike. There are the places of sorrow and the places of joy. There are the places of bitter repentance, where there

is a continual rain of tears. There are the places of the pure gladness of goodness, where it is always light; there are places of calm peace and serene content; places of darkness and the shadow of death. And we pass from one to another. Experience sends us to what is for us a strange land—a new experience; and it is well for us then, if in God's infinite goodness and mercy we find beside us there, like the captives in Babylon, one whom God has sent to sit where we sit, to walk where we walk, to speak the wise and warning word.

So the thought which we find in our text is simple enough. It is just this—that you cannot influence men and women from a distance. You must come into touch with them. There is nothing remote or separate or aloof about the attitude and the labour of the men and women who are giving themselves to the best work in the world. They go to men; they place themselves beside men; they try to understand and feel and think with men. "I came to them of the captivity, and I sat where they sat."

We have an evident illustration and application of this in what is a feature of modern religious enterprise among the poor and the lapsed—the institution of Settlements in the poorest districts of great cities. In these Settlements the workers live among the people. They sit where they sit. They dwell with them where they dwell. And no doubt also a large

part of the success of the Salvation Army is due to the fact that its workers take up their quarters among those whom they would win to Christ, and share the life of the people. There are members of General Booth's Army, young unprotected women, who have lived for years in the midst of the worst quarters of East London, surrounded by vice and crime, drunkenness and debauchery, yet moving about unmolested by night and by day. They are perfectly safe, respected and even loved for the good they do, breathing in such unsavoury places something of the very love of Christ, winning a strange influence upon the people they live beside. We can understand it. It is different from the occasional visit from the outside with tract or dole. The educated man, the Christian woman who goes where the fallen and sinful, the forsaken and struggling are, and who lives there, must have a marvellous influence and power.

And so it is all over the world. You do not bring the heathen to Christianity by sending them Bibles which they cannot read. Some must go among them and sit where they sit, learn all their language, and look upon all their life, and enter in thought and sympathy into their ignorance and darkness and need, until they are made to feel that the missionary has come in love with a message and a blessing for them.

Believe me, the redemption of the world must come by the labour of the Christ-like souls who go

out to seek and to save that which is lost, who can endure the hardness of passing out and passing down into the midst of the darkness and the sin. There is no other way. Life must seek life; heart must touch heart; man must go to man. The command may come upon us to go to such places and such people and sit where they sit. But even if we cannot share the service thus, let us see that we do not forget the loving watchers of God in the mission-outposts and in the dark places of the earth. Think of them often. Have a place for them in your prayers and in your heart. The world needs them; God needs them.

But surely there is an aspect and an application of this which none of us can escape. It is very practical and very personal. Whether we will or not, you and I are in continual and close contact with our fellows in all their varying conditions and circumstances and experiences. I may take it for granted that we would wish every one of us to be of some kindly use in the world. Life is a poor and miserable business if you have not that ambition. Well, here is the secret of all true and helpful service of mankind—"I came to them of the captivity, and I sat where they sat."

When your neighbour is in great sorrow, you can place yourself beside him and let him feel that your heart feels with his. When some one is in distress, or even in disgrace, you may draw near him and let him

understand that, as far as you can, you have thought yourself into his life, and that what you can do for his heartening and help you will. Whatever the need or trouble may be, you yourself, by your magnetic presence and sympathy, can do untold work of blessing and healing and comfort. Why, you even teach a class of little children best by sitting where they sit. The successful teacher thinks himself into the thought and life of the child. The true teacher goes back to the beginning himself, and begins again with every youth whom he introduces to his subject. Really he is not at the desk but on the bench beside his students. Again he sits where they sit.

No doubt, it becomes almost a burden when it is laid upon a man's life, when he must go where men are in all the phases and experiences of their being, when he must speak the stern or kindly word, and share the sorrows or the joys. Sometimes it may become almost more than a sensitive man's heart can bear. Yet there is a joy in bearing it.

It would be good for us all to think of this more than we do. Let the soul have outlet in a wider range of thought and sympathy. Let the rich set themselves in thought and sympathy into the life of the poor. Let the respectable and correct think themselves into the lives of the fallen, with their trials and their weaknesses, and the stress of the influences which have been too great for them. Let the wise think them-

selves into the lives of the simple. Try to sit in soul where they sit who are not of your station or respectability, or education, or opinion, or belief. Only so can come the large charity and the helpful life of co-operation and brotherhood, by which the world will be redeemed from selfishness, from the ills that arise from the isolation of life from life, when all seek their own, and think of their own, and look not also on the things of others.

Need I remind you in closing, and this is the deepest thought which such words bring to us, that the secret of the prophet's service is the secret of our salvation.

What is the meaning of Christ and His Holy Incarnation? In the awful deeps of the mystery of Godhead the Eternal Love moved, and God became man. "I came to them of the captivity, and I sat where they sat." He took flesh and dwelt among us. The Son of God comes down among men. He shares the experience of our mortal flesh. He passes into a fellow-feeling with our human ills and needs until they lie upon Him with a weight untold. He feels the burden of our sin. He bears it on His heart upon the Cross.

You are saved because Jesus Christ came down beside you and shared your life until He understood your very sin. I sometimes think that we see it nowhere so strikingly as in the baptism of Jesus. Why was He there among the penitents making the

plunge in the rushing waters? He went with the crowd; He sat where they sat. He was beside them listening to the stern words of the desert-preacher. He was beside them in their tears of confession. He was beside them in their plunge in the river, identified with them though sinless Himself. That was sympathy, the sympathy by which we are saved.

Truly, never any man did much for the world who did not feel as Christ felt for men. All the good is born of sympathy. You can never bless the world by sitting apart. You can help men only as you make common cause with them, as you sit where they sit in their captivity, as you get beneath their burdens. We see it in the Cross; and the love of Christ constraineth us. He sets us beside those who are waiting for our help, saying, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

IX.

DAVID.

"David served his own generation by the will of God."—Acts xiii. 36.

IX.

DAVID.

THERE is nothing so lovely, nothing so happy, as right living—and nothing so difficult. How easily life may be spoilt! How easy it is to let something come into your life that puts it all wrong —some selfish motive, some low purpose, some forgetfulness, some indulgence, something that destroys the beauty of it.

There is nothing so lovely as a right life. But, if we are to live right, we must think right about life; and there is nothing we need so much as this—to have some true thought about life brought home to us again and again in an impressive way. We say —What is it to live? So many things come into my life. How can we see the whole of its varied effort and experience reduced to some simple principle? And here it is. Many things come into our life. There come to us times of rest, and there come to us times of play; but we need to learn that life is not resting, and it is not playing. It is working; it is service. So it is here in the life of David.

Life is service. It is the Christian truth about

life, and there is no greater proof of the power of Christ than this—that this view of life has prevailed against all others. Christ has won the victory for this nobler philosophy of life. True, men are selfish and slow to practise it; but in presence of it they are ashamed of their selfishness; and when they begin to speak about life and write about it they take Christ's words. They cannot make a decent theory of life out of their cold-blooded selfishness; and for very shame they are forced to say it after Him—Life is service.

But we often forget that this is what Christ means when He says it—the service of God more than the service of man. I think it is a very shallow way of reading Christ's words, if you fancy that, when He speaks of service, He means just what you have in the Good Samaritan. Of course it means that; certainly it means that; but it means far more than that. There is a First Commandment which is always first—"Thou shalt love God" and serve Him.

Indeed, there is nothing between man and man to constitute this relation. I have never seen the man who can look me in the face and say, "You are my servant." I have never seen him. It is only in the presence of God that I feel obedient, only when I stand before Him "whose I am and whom I serve."

And to attempt to make morality without God, and to keep up service as a thing between man and man without Divine sanctions is to build on sand;

and the confusions of society soon prove it. I say, there is nothing between man and man to constitute this relation, only between God and man; and when Christ says it, and all the New Testament says it—"Servants"—there is a sound theory of life in the word because behind it there is nothing less than this—the existence of God. Why am I here, and why am I thus—such a man in such a world at such a time? If we believe in God, the answer must be this. His love gave me my being, and I am His, and Him I serve, and by His will I live. We are servants of God.

But of course it is abundantly true that the service of God is the service of man. So it works itself out. If I am the servant of God, then I want to do what God is always doing. If we can find out what God lives for, then we can determine too what human life is for; for His purposes are ours, if we are His servants. And this is what God lives for—for the good of all He loves. The life Divine is love Divine; God's life is ceaseless service. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, there at the lowliest He is most Godlike. The one revelation we have seen of God is this—"in the form of a servant." God's angels are all ministering spirits; and all God's worlds are built for service. The constitution of nature is not organised selfishness; it is the perfection of harmonious ministry. And for us this is Divine service—when we fall in with God's kind ways in God's needy

world. When the sermon is done, and the music ended, and the doors shut, and we are all out in the street and the world—"Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these ye do it unto Me." The service of God is the service of man.

Here are these two in my text—"his own generation by the will of God."

God and our generation—we want to feel this about our life. I want to feel it here. There comes in upon me, in about me, a bit of my own generation. Like a little wave from the great sea, that runs up the sand and fills some little pool among the rocks, so from the great tide of humanity there comes in upon me here some little wave of the world's life—something of interest and opportunity, something from my own generation; and I must meet it and minister to it. It is here that it flows in upon me and I come into touch with it; and the point of contact is the place of service. Where I meet it, I must serve my generation by the will of God. For I want to feel this too—that God is here. I stand between Him and the men I serve. God has a mind and a will about this ministry of mine. Who can doubt it? If the truth is spoken as we know it honestly, if there is anything in word or worship to give rest to the weary, anything that brings the heart nearer to God, who can doubt it—that even here as I serve my generation God's will is done?

And never fancy that your office is less sacred

than mine. If it is, it is because you make it so. You want to feel thus about that place which is as familiar to your feet as this pulpit is to mine. In school or college, in the office or the market, when the children fill the class-room, when clients or customers come in about you, friends and neighbours, it is your own generation. It is there that you touch your generation; and the point of contact is the place of service. You must meet it; you must serve your generation by the will of God; for even there if you can keep away from you the fatal influence of mere selfishness and greed, if you can see a nobler meaning in your work, if you do your work in the spirit of Christ, making it impressive and useful—who can doubt it?—even there as you serve your generation, it is God's will that is done.

Now, I think that, if we look at David's life, we may see that this word is not far from every one of us. Follow David, and see how his work is done—with the shepherd's crook and the chieftain's sword and the king's sceptre and the minstrel's harp. Shepherd and outlaw and king and singer, David served.

David begins thus humbly, as many a great and useful life has begun in our own country—out in the fields. I could name a score of great Scotsmen who began like this—as "herd-laddie." Out from the little village in Judea on the edge of the wilderness, guarding a few sheep, leading them out in the

morning, finding for them grass and water, and folding them safely at night, a brave, healthy, hardy boy, with his leathern sling at his waist, and his shepherd's staff in his hand, and his rude harp—this is David, happy as the day is long, and useful and content.

It is the lesson we find so often in the Bible of the dignity and the worth and the wide-reaching influence of honest work, however humble it may be. David kept his few sheep in the wilderness; and so he served his generation. What the world wanted from David just then was to be a good shepherd. And the whole world would have been poorer if that flock had not been carefully tended. Every man who shirks his work, every man who scamps his work, every bit of bad work impoverishes the world, and lowers and degrades the whole of human life. Every bit of honest, useful, excellent work increases the world's wealth; and every man who puts character into his work adds something to the sum of goodness in the world. He makes it easier for all the rest to be good and faithful too. He lifts a little higher the standard of living among men.

Remember Jesus, for long years a carpenter. Remember how David first with his shepherd's crook "served his generation by the will of God."

But the happy life at Bethlehem is soon broken up, and David goes out into the great world with its courts and camps. After a brief time in the favour

of Saul, the scene changes suddenly again to the desert where he is "hunted like a partridge upon the mountains," a fugitive, a freebooter. See him in the wilderness, the same wilderness into which he had often ventured seeking the sheep that had strayed, himself now hunted like a beast across its barren hills. See him in the rocky hold of Adullam, with his wild, devoted band, strong and swift, frank and bold, prudent and patient and modest—a born leader of men.

Now he was David the outlaw, but still he served his generation. Here are the two men, the two kings in Israel—the one with his ruddy beauty and bright eyes and lithe form, and the other gaunt and haggard and black, his giant strength weakened, and his goodly face seamed and seared, writhing in the grip of his evil spirit. David was driven out into the desert, hunted by the mad king; but the cause of God in Israel was not centred in the palace at Gibeah—it was bound up with the fortunes of the exile and the outlaw.

This is the lesson. The service which God wants, and your generation needs, may often be this—to go into opposition, to protest, to resist and oppose, even to suffer. There are times when the country can be saved only by a loud protest. And though the man who makes it be driven out and persecuted, still this may be his noble service to his time.

How much of the truth we hold and the liberty we enjoy has been won for us by persecuted

minorities! The true King is not always he who wears the purple, and the true Church is not always the Church that enjoys the favour of kings. Often, as we in our land know, the fortunes of Christ's Kingdom, the true Evangel and the liberties of Christian men, the very Ark of God has been with a persecuted remnant hunted over moss and moorland.

There are degenerate men among us who sneer at the name "Protestant," "Nonconformist," "Covenanter." They forget the great spiritual facts and forces that such words cover. They forget that all that has made for us our character and our place among the nations has come to us from those who protested and fought and bled for the truth and the liberty that we now have.

In our own experience it will be the same. Often the service we have to give to our generation is this—not to fall in with its ways, but to resist and oppose and protest. In our easy circumstances there is a great deal of the New Testament that we hardly understand. We are the disciples of a Crucified Lord—does it look like it? The world gave Him a cross, and if we stand beside Him what comes to us? Look into the New Testament and learn this—the Christian will always be a man who has the world against him. In the world, as the Apostles saw it, there are clear lines between the kingdoms of light and darkness, and across that frontier there is ever the noise of battle. And if you live in your generation by the will of God, as

your generation comes in about you, in many a little company and society, you will find that you must protest even though you be hated for it. Then you will remember how David stood for the cause of God in Israel against the apostasy of Saul, and how even in those dark days, even as an outlaw, David "served his generation by the will of God."

But of course it all came right in the end. One more swift change, and David is on the throne—King, first at Hebron, and then at Jerusalem. And still he "served his generation." When the shepherd became the sovereign, he was a shepherd still, the shepherd of Israel, the servant of his people.

How near this comes to the mind of Christ! The master is the minister. This serving man was a king. Girt with all the authority of power, and gifted with all the resources of genius, and housed amid the wealth and luxury of royal state, this man served. Is it not the lesson of Christ Himself? "He that is greatest among you, let him be the servant." Whatever your station, you cannot escape the obligation to serve. Rather it comes upon you more and more the higher you go. The obligation of service expands with the increase of our possessions and opportunities; and where much is given much is required. The king owes to his subject a larger loyalty than the subject to his king; and the master is a greater debtor to his servant than the

servant to his master. And the bulk of the service is to be rendered not by the weak and the needy, but by the exalted and the competent.

So the Divine law goes right against our common notions. We think that the higher a man climbs the further he gets from the burden of work; and a gentleman is one who can live without working; and a sovereign is a self-indulgent despot with troops of slaves. God's law is the very opposite. The higher you go, the harder you work. The forms of service change; the service never ceases. *Noblesse oblige.* The higher you climb, the harder you work; and the highest in the realm is but the Prime Minister—Chief Servant. First in honour, first in command, but also first in service.

It adds a peculiar charm to David's life when we think of him as a minstrel-hero, soldier and singer. When he lays aside the sword, he takes the harp. When the battle is over, there is banquet and song.

No doubt, it came to him in his earliest days. As day by day he went forth to the fields, he beguiled his time with some rude instrument, waking the echoes of the solitudes with the melodies he loved. He took it with him to the palace. He came like a sunbeam into the darkness where Saul wrestled with his misery. When the moody madness was upon the king, David's harp could work wonders.

"God sent His singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men
And bring them back to heaven again."

Happy they who have this gift, and who know to what high and holy ends it may be used. There is no brighter, sweeter service than that of those who bring the music into life and chase away the sadness.

So David served his generation—the sweet singer of Israel. You remember the familiar saying of a famous Scotsman—"Let me make the songs of a people, and I care not who makes their laws." To make the songs—it is to shape the thoughts and emotions, to mould the life and spirit and temper of the people. Think of our own land. Away in the south think of the wide valley of the Tweed, with all its beauty and interest. How little you know of the land till you know its songs—the minstrelsy of the Border as it floats about glen and stream and hill and ruined abbey and castle.

"Let me make the songs." And in our religious life to make the hymns and psalms. Yes, let me make the hymns, and I care not who writes the creeds. Try to think of the history of a Hymn or of a Psalm like the Twenty-third or the Fifty-first. Where has it been and what has it done? How often have hearts been comforted, and fears quieted, and trembling feet steadied as they entered the dark valley! How many have found here a voice for their penitence and praise! Who can tell the story, the

service to the generations? To give to the dumb spirit speech before God, to express for us the thoughts and emotions we cannot utter, the sense of sin, the tender trust in God, the doubt and fear, and hope and gladness, every element in our experience, every strain high and low, to come to us with a message of peace set to sweetest music—surely this is the noblest service ever permitted to mortal man to render to his kind.

Not many of us perhaps can make such messages; but we can repeat the gracious words that others give us. Some of us can sing them; some of us can speak them. It is the same service—to give a word in season to him that is weary. Whether we speak it or sing it, it is the ministry Christ asks us to fulfil, like giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul.

Shepherd and Outlaw, King and Minstrel and Psalmist—so through every part of his life David was true to the secret of good living. "He served his own generation by the will of God."

X.

THE BEGINNING.

"All that Jesus began both to do and teach."—ACTS i. 1.

X.

THE BEGINNING.

ONE of the strongest supports we have for our hope of immortality is the feeling that comes to us again and again of the incompleteness of our life here. It is so short. It would need to be far longer if we are to put forth all that is in us, and reach all that is set before us, and finish all that we begin. It may be good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. And the better our life is as far as it goes, the greater the necessity that it should go further.

It is only in the early days that we find ourselves saying that there is plenty of time for all that we wish to do. We soon change our minds about that. Life is tyrannical as it grows upon us. It seems to drive us into a corner. We are more and more conscious of the insufficient limits within which we are confined. All the time that our life is growing less, our thoughts about life are growing bigger; all the time that our days are diminishing, there may be, there should be, growing within us higher thoughts, nobler purposes, stronger faculties, richer affections, till it comes to this—that a man may

reach his highest thought of what his life should be, and come to his greatest fitness to make it something like what it should be, just at the time when he must give it up.

Take it as you please, take it at the best—in mental attainment and moral discipline, in spiritual power and loving service, we never get finished. We learn a little, love a little, grow a little, work a little; and then we must stop. In all that constitutes our highest life we do not get far enough; we only begin here.

The text tells us that even the life of Christ Himself was but a beginning—"He began to do and teach." He died young: His was a short life and a brief ministry. It wears in many ways the appearance of incompleteness. And when a man dies thus —young, full of promise, on the threshold of so much—the heart makes its protest and appeal to God, to Him in whose hand our breath is and whose are all our ways. It cannot be that all that has utterly, finally ceased to be. You cannot roll the stone to the sepulchre and say, "That is all." You cannot lay the sod on that heart that has not beat out half its life and say, "That is all." We demand a future in which the bright promise may be fulfilled.

When we look at the life of Christ in this way, we demand a future for Him too. It cannot be that Christ, in whom life has reached its highest expression, in whom spiritual power is so intense and so

beneficent—it cannot be that He should suddenly, utterly cease to be. It cannot be that Christ as a person should not continue to think and love and live and be a spiritual force that satisfies itself as it spends itself in worthy ways. The "lorn Syrian grave on which the stars look down"—it contradicts our deepest instincts; it is incredible. As St. Peter says: "It was not possible that He should be holden of death." For the higher our life as far as it goes, the greater the necessity that it should go further; and that Christ should get no further than such a beginning—as St. Peter says, it is simply "not possible."

Now this is what is given us as we turn the pages of the New Testament—the future that we demand for Christ. This is His later history, His life continued. It is not the mere memory of His earthly appearing; it is not the light that lingers when the sun has set; it is not the echo of His teaching that still fills the world's ear; it is not the impulse that He gave to the world still moving men; it is not the effort that His Apostles make because they have caught something of His spirit. It is Himself that lives and works and reigns and saves.

This is the meaning of this Book of Acts with this word at the head of it. It is the writer of the third Gospel who writes this book too; and in this brief preface he links on his later work to the former treatise, and dedicates it to the same Theophilus,

that he may have this connected view of what Christianity thus far means. It is not a book all by itself; it is not an independent work; it is Part Second in the same volume. St. Luke suggests this in his first sentence. The verb is emphatic, and it means this—that as this writer has done his best already to tell us how Christ *began* to do and teach, so he will now tell us how Christ *continued* His work after He was taken up.

"Jesus began to do." Does it not suggest the newness, the freshness, the originality that is about the work of Christ? It is what He initiated—what He began. There never had been anything like it in the world before.

I am afraid we hardly realise it now. Christianity has become to us an everyday thing, an old thing, so different from the amazing miracle which once it was. We fail to realise how immense, how Divine was the revolution that it wrought. It was a new thing coming into the old world to make all things new. Christ Himself compares it to new wine whose generous life will burst the old wine-skins. It is a new Covenant, and a new Commandment; and what is that but a new Religion and a newness of life?

Christ really did begin something when He began to do and teach. He brought new ideas and new energies into the thought and life of men. He did not borrow, or copy, or use up old material. He did

not give a turn to the kaleidoscope and make the old things fall into new and interesting combinations. Christ had a contribution to make that was His own ; He had something to give. He had what we call genius in other men—the power to originate and initiate. He was creative. He did not depend on anybody else ; He could light His own fire, and grow His own seed, and begin from the beginning Himself.

He "began to do and teach." Christ began it because there was nothing like it here before. The model did not exist that He could copy ; the book was not written from which He could borrow ; the material was not there that could make Him what He was. He is not the product of His age, but the producer of a new age. He turned the course of history, and sent the world's life streaming in new channels and to new ends. What a beginning it was when He began !

There is something satisfactory in this too. Christ began it—He got it started.

We say that the difficulty is to get begun, and "well begun is half done." It takes something of a pull to make a start, especially if you are going uphill ; and the direction, the tendency of everything about the Christian movement, is upward. To get Christianity started in the world—was it not a great achievement ?

We need to remember this because this is the

completeness of Christ's work. It was a great thing when He could say—"It is begun." You do not need to remind me that what Christ actually did say is rather this—"It is finished;" for there is no contradiction here. Look at it on one side, and it is a beginning. Look at it in another aspect, and it is complete. And the completeness of it is this—that Christ finished the beginning. He laid the foundation; He was Himself the corn of wheat falling into the ground.

You may look at a few big stones, laid on the ground and firmly cemented together, and you say, "That is not a house!" Of course it is not. As a house it is a very unfinished affair, but as a foundation it is all that it needs to be. You may look at a seed, and say, "This is very elementary, rudimentary, incomplete; where is the flower, the lily, where the beauty and fragrance? where is the tree, the wide-spreading shelter and abundant fruit?" Of course it is not there. But as a seed it is complete, finished, holding within it the promise and the potency of all that you are asking for—perfect as a beginning.

That is the kind of thing that Christ provided. He finished the beginning. He did all that was needed to make Christianity not only a possibility but a certainty. He did so much, and did it so well, that there has come out of it, and after it, all Christian history—whole centuries of Christian experience and Christian progress. All that Christian thought and

life and work—He made it possible and certain to be when He "began to do and teach."

You can easily take the teaching of Jesus and say, "How incomplete—broken bits of occasional utterance!" Yet read it all again, and say whether Christ has not revealed God to the world. Look at it as a Divine message from the heart of God to the heart of man. Is it insufficient?

And when you look at what Christ did as well as taught—well, when you take a certain view, you can make it a very broken affair, all as incomplete as any life that ends at thirty-three. But if the Son of God took flesh and dwelt among us; if He came to manifest a spirit, a purpose, a pity and love and grace that make all things possible between God and sinful men; if He came to make Himself an offering for sin—the Cross His greatest achievement as He overcame death and opened the Kingdom of Heaven; if you think thus of that Birth, that Life, that Cross, and that empty Grave, then these are our foundation-stones laid firm. These are the Christian facts that make the Christian faith, always there and always the same.

Christ finished the beginning; and the lesson for us is this—that we must be true to the beginning. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We cannot disown the foundation; we must be true to Christ. There is something everlasting and unchanging in the Gospels, and we cannot forsake it. Christ, as He revealed

Himself in word and deed, is the test for all that is called Christian; and nothing can be permitted to bear His name which cannot stand in the presence of the Gospels, and prove itself in inmost harmony with what He "began to do and teach."

But while the text tells us of a beginning, it suggests to us something more. Christ finished the beginning, but still it was only a beginning, it was incomplete.

We stand at the end of the Gospels, and, as I said, we demand a future for Christ. We ask for the next volume. Neither the stone at the door of the sepulchre nor the cloud that hung over Olivet can be the finish. There must be more of Christ than that.

So St. Luke gives us this second treatise; and is it not a wonderful story? It begins in the Upper Room, and it ends in the Imperial City. What a distance is bridged by this brief book — from Jerusalem to Rome! It covers all the world as the world was then—Jewish and Gentile, East and West. What a story of various and victorious activity as the Gospel reaches out from that one room to synagogue and school, to cities and villages, to the house and the market-place, to prisons and palaces, to the open country and the wide sea! In chariots and in ships it travels over continent and island. It comes to Jew and Gentile, to the learned and the rude, to the Pharisee and the sinner, to Roman

governors and generals, to Greek philosophers and merchants, to soldiers and sailors and slaves, to men and women of every rank and type and tongue—to busy Antioch and learned Athens, to Ephesus and Corinth, on at last to Imperial Rome. What a record of power and progress! And the book breaks off abruptly as Paul is planted in the Eternal City, "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." It breaks off then, very probably, because it had gone no further when St. Luke was writing. It breaks off abruptly, because it is a tale that never ends.

Now, when we look into this book, what is it that we find? Is it not really, as St. Luke suggests in this first sentence, Christ Himself continuing the work that He began? He is the Agent in all the Acts; He is the Power in every miracle; He is the Guide in every movement; He is the Leader in every battle; He is the Victor in every conquest. When we pass from the Gospels to the Acts, it is the same Worker and the same work. St. Luke binds his books together, because the two are one.

It is the same Worker. Turn the pages of this book, and on every page everything is referred to Christ Himself. He sends the Spirit; He works the miracles; He heals and smites; He adds to the Church; He gives the word and opens the heart to take it in. He sends Peter; He instructs Philip; He apprehends Saul. It is Christ that does it all.

And is it not the same work? When we pass from the work of Christ to the work of the Apostles,

do we find ourselves on different lines? Everybody knows what Jesus began to do. How He loved to lift off the burden of disease; and when the soul was sick because of sin, He loved exceedingly to lift that bitter load away. And what is it that we have in Acts but this? In all that pagan world into which the Apostles penetrated, that world with its hatred and lust and violence, nothing else touched the misery and the sin but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified."

Is it not all of a piece with that first sermon at Nazareth—"To preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus said it, and Paul repeats it, because he had seen it with his own eyes. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It rings through the whole of Christian history. He comes among us, gets about us, and persuades and enables us still to rise above our sins. It is the same Worker doing the same work. Christ continues what He began.

But we need to remember that Christ continues His work through persons. There is no other way. "God works by means, and His means are men."

It is a great gift—to be able to manage men and

make them repeat yourself and do your work; and Christ can manage men supremely. We see something of it in the Gospels. He multiplied Himself tenfold when He got His disciples about Him.

And when Jesus had ascended, the problem came to be this—Can He do this still? Can there be any more Apostles? Is it possible among those who never saw Him, who never knew Christ after the flesh? The impressive answer came in the experience and the ministry of St. Paul. Christ can approach and apprehend and claim and subdue and possess and inspire and use a man who never saw Him in the flesh. When we read St. Paul's letters, we see how completely this man has been taken up into the larger life of Christ. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

That was how the work of Christ was done in Apostolic days, and that is how it is done still—by men who yield themselves to be His, taking all that He will give, and giving all that He will take—surrendered men and women. Then Christ lives in all our life, and works in all our service; and by the hands and hearts and lips and love of those who are His own He continues in the world the work that He began.

It is the duty of everyone of us to find our place behind Christ and within this great succession of His servants—to make our little contribution to the work that He began, and to help to fill up what is behind of His service.

Christ wants you, and He wants you to-day. If you are to do anything for Him you must do it to-day. "Your own generation"—that is the field God gives you—the life that lies about you as it touches your life. Let us not dream of better days behind us or before us. Let us believe in the unspeakable privilege of the present. There never was any time better than our time, for Christ is in it. He is the same yesterday and to-day. He is "not far from every one of us."

"Christ liveth in me." Christian men and women should say it still. He lives in happy hearts, and pure and patient souls, in trustful simple natures that never doubt His word. He lives in the wiser, gentler minds of men. He lives in Christ-like thought and speech, in lowly sympathy and loving endeavour. He lives in men made better by His presence. He wants to live in you; and then all your activities will be governed by His Spirit, and through your hands and heart and lips and love something of His unfinished work may yet be done.

XI.

CHRIST'S WORD TO SIMON.

"And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on."—LUKE vii. 40.

XI.

CHRIST'S WORD TO SIMON.

AS you read the Gospels, you cannot but notice this—how much of the teaching of Christ is Table-talk. It is not preaching ; it is conversation. It does not come to us from bench or pulpit, not from any artificial altitude. It comes to men as they sit at table in social fellowship.

It is a great feature of His ministry. He sought society—not like the Baptist, who shunned it. We find Him not in the desert, a haggard hermit-preacher, but in village and city, street and market-place, synagogue and Temple, where men most do congregate. And how often we find Him present at feasts! He accepted such hospitality with great readiness and heartiness because it brought Him near to men and brought men near to one another as they met together in the freedom and exhilaration of human fellowship. Here He found His place and His opportunity. And hence, as I said, so much of His teaching is real Table-talk.

You remember also how some of the best books in the world's literature come to us in this form.

How much of the wisest and the wittiest is not the product of the study and the midnight oil, but is given off in the free play of mind with mind in social fellowship. It is Table-talk. We think of Luther's, Selden's, Coleridge's Table-talk, Goethe's Conversations, and Boswell. These are living books, full of quick, intense interest, often far more interesting, because far more truly revealing the mind and the man, than works that are much more careful and elaborate. There is a spontaneity, a sincerity, a heartiness, a lively vigour and impressiveness about such speech, that is more attractive than the finest writing. It shows the man when he is thrown suddenly on his resources and must speak out in answer to whatever the occasion demands.

Nowhere do we see the immense interest and power, and the durable fame, even of such transient talk as in the case of Samuel Johnson. What would he be to-day but for his Biography, but for his Table-talk? No doubt he thought this of very secondary importance beside his ponderous writings. But to-day there are thousands who read Boswell and nothing else about him. As Macaulay says: "The reputation of those writings which he probably expected to be immortal is every day fading; while that careless Table-talk, the memory of which he probably thought would die with him, is like to be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe."

This is what we have from Christ—not sermons

or essays, not preaching, but conversation. Imagine the talk in any house, at any table, when He was there—such wise and weighty and winsome talk! "Never man spake like this man." He was always ready for any question, any sudden challenge, for anything the situation should require, any opportunity it might provide. He was always ready to look across the table to host or guest, and say—"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

For one thing it means this—*Christ has always something to say.*

You know what happens often when men come together. There are many situations in which you discover the advantage of having something to say. You do not feel awkward, you can break the silence; you are not thrown out, helpless in presence of the situation. You can meet it with a message, you can speak the word in season. Many a difficult situation is relieved by a word; and we thank God for the man who has "something to say."

That man has the power; for knowledge is power—and wisdom and speech. In any society the leadership goes to him. Whatever we may say of the worth and the beauty of silence, I think that in this world it is ever true that the man who can speak is the master of those who cannot speak. Keep your eyes open, and you will see it. The advantage is ever with the person who has something to say.

On the grandest scale this is the power of Christ —that in this world of ours, with its problems and its mysteries and its miseries, in this strange life of ours, sitting with men beside Him, men often going wrong, wanting to go right, asking what it all meant —just there He had something to say. When all the rest are silenced, or at best perplexed, He speaks. This is His place in every company where He appears, in every house He enters, in every life He visits. He has something in His mind and in His heart— Oh! if He could only tell it, and if we would only hear it, the darkness would lift, and we would be happy and at peace. He is, and ever must be, in every company the Prophet who can speak.

Also it means this—that *Christ has always something more to say.*

There are people who have something to say, but when they have said it they have nothing more to say. You know the kind of people. The second time you meet that man he tells you the same stories, he makes the same reflections and remarks. You have got to the bottom of that well already, come to the end of his resources.

But Christ is different. He has always something more to say; He is simply endless. You never exhaust Him, never come to the last word. This is the characteristic of His teaching as it is of Himself —that while it is so simple, coming near to us in familiar words, we feel that in His wisdom there are

heights and depths beyond all that we know. It is "His fulness," not the fulness of the pitcher, but the fulness of the fountain—the brimming well.

It was the meaning of His own prediction—"My words shall not pass away." He rises above all the centuries with a message to the Twentieth Century as truly as to the First. The time never comes when Christ has nothing for us, the hour never comes when we feel that we have come to the end of Him. Let knowledge grow, let life advance, and He is still in front of us. We never overtake Him. Find yourself where you may, confronted by any experience, Christ will have His peculiar message and gift and greatness; we turn from every other teacher to cling to His feet, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

You can always say to Him, as Simon said, "Master, say on." Yes, on and on; say more and more; for Christ has always something more to say.

Again, it means this—that *Christ has something personal to say.* "Simon, I have somewhat to say *unto thee.*"

This also is a strong note of the ministry of Christ—this personal note, this individual dealing. He had little of the craving for a crowd to speak to. He never thought His words wasted, though He gave the best of them to one sinful woman at a well-side. Rather this was in keeping with the greatest things that He believed and taught of the love of God and

the worth of the single soul. And how much of the Gospel comes to us in such interviews, such personal dealing—"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

"I to thee." Surely this arrests our attention. It is such a pointed sentence. "Simon"—He calls him by his name. "Simon, the man I know, know even to his inner thoughts; and this is something that I say in answer to the thoughts which I can read in that face; I know thee well—what a man thou art, Simon! What a man at this present moment, sitting offended and silent, but thinking much! And I have something to say to thee in answer to thy thinking."

It is so personal. The word that answers your thought is a word that is your own. The word that goes beyond your outer life to your inner experience is your own; and to your thoughts He answers. Who can do that across the table but He? You are thinking all by yourself, and nobody knows. There is something aye you keep to yourself, and scarcely tell to any other. But He knows. And just about that inner life that is your own life and your true life, the expression and experience of your real self, to that Christ has something to say. Is it doubt, or is it sin? Is it unkind, suspicious, censorious thoughts of somebody? Is it selfish planning and scheming for yourself? Is it hard thoughts of God or low thoughts of life? To all that inner thinking He answers; so personal is Christ's word.

I think this is often the great kindness of it—it is a word for you. Have you never had this experience—when someone far above yourself in intellect or in place has spoken to you? I remember such an experience in a dark day in my own life, when the man, for whom of all men living I had the greatest veneration, spoke a word to me, because he knew that I needed it. I have never forgotten it, never forgotten the spot where that word was spoken. Believe me, it is this personal note of kindness and knowledge, of sympathy and interest, that makes life precious.

This is Christ's way—a word for you because He knows you to the heart. He says: "I entered into thine house"; I have come into your life and I see how it is, with all your weaknesses, follies, contradictions, sins; all your worries and burdens, temptations and anxieties; all that the world could not understand; all that you would shrink from telling; all that is indeed a wonder and a perplexity to yourself. Can you think of it? There is One who knows all that. When it seems as if we were in utter solitariness, and beyond all possibility of help or cheer, we may hear the voice of Jesus whispering in tenderest considerateness: "Simon, th man I know, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

It is a kind word. Surely it would not be fair to forget that. I think I could show you how kind was the word that He spoke to Simon. He wanted

to save that cold-hearted, hard-hearted Pharisee. He wanted to tell him something he did not know, but which the woman knew, of the infinite bliss of pardon.

It is a kind word; but often also it is a serious, stern, practical word. For Christ speaks to the conscience; and that makes it personal too. There is nothing that so sets us, man by man, apart as conscience.

Now, think what it means when we meet the word of Christ as Simon did, inviting criticism, judgment, advice—"Master, say on." It is an anxious moment for the schoolboy, when the master's eye is on the page of his exercise-book; and for the apprentice, when his piece of imperfect work is in the hands of the master who knows so well what good work means; and for the artist, when another greater artist comes to his studio and he sets the picture on the easel, the very best he ever did—"Master, say on." And when my life comes under His eye, when He enters into the house of my life, can I look across the table and say, "Master, say on"?

Think what it means when you let Christ come into your life, into your home, your business, your Church, and say: "Speak, Lord; tell me all you have to say; let your light in upon this and this and this — your spirit, your principles; tell me everything." Are we prepared for this?

There are men and women who are simply frightened to let Christ speak to them; almost

afraid to come to Church and let the truth of Christ and the message of Christ meet their life and shine in upon them to their shame. Are you afraid to give Him this permission? But He asks for it, so perfect is His courtesy. It is a question we sometimes put to one another—"Will you let me speak to you?" You know that we do not say that, unless we have something important to say. And Christ says this—"I have something to say; shall I say it? Will you let me say it?" "Master, say on."

Can you think out what this means? Take it home with you, and in your home life, among your children, at your table, and in your table-talk, has Christ nothing to say to you? This very afternoon, when you are settling down in your easy-chair, has Christ nothing to say to you? Is there not a class of little children somewhere, a ward in the Infirmary, some bit of beautiful work that you might help for His sake? To-morrow morning, when you meet your business, has Christ nothing to say to you? Over the desk and the ledger, as well as across the table, can you look up to Him? And when you strike your balance, and gather all that money, "Master, say on;" tell me what to do with all this. Christ has a mind about these things. He looks in at the office-door—"I have somewhat to say unto thee."

And in our social life, our city life, how many of our perplexing and painful problems would be

solved; how much misery would be ended if we were truly willing to let Christ speak to us! And in our Church life—even here, how far is this religious life of ours from being what Christ would make it? We can never forget that the severest words He spoke on earth were spoken to such as ourselves—to the respectable, religious people of His day; the people who were filling the Churches, keeping up the services. If that great Presence should come among us, how would He speak? About our religion, and its depth and sincerity; about our life, and its likeness to His own; about "this woman," and the problem she makes—how would He speak? Jesus has somewhat to say to us.

It is interesting to notice how again and again there seems to come an awakening of the Christian conscience, when questions are raised as to what the great precepts of Christ really mean, and how far the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount are possible of fulfilment. There comes an uprising of concern as to whether we Christians are not quietly consenting to ideas and practices which are not to be reconciled with the mind of Christ.

This is altogether good — this sensitiveness of conscience, this sincerity. Let Christ come in upon the selfishness and the worldliness of our life. Ever let Him speak, no matter what inconvenience or shame may follow to us who have disobeyed Him so long. As one writer says, this is what we professing Christians need—"an honest attempt to

secure that perpetual revision of life which is implicit in the conception of Christ's authority." Think of it—that perpetual revision of life which is involved in our confession of Christ's authority. "Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am." Then, "Speak, Lord"; "Master, say on."

Let Christ have His place beside you. Let Him *in* and let Him *speak*. Every morning lift your eyes to that Face that looked across the table and said: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." Think of it thus, and say, "Master, say on." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

For at the last our life is safe and strong, or weak and unstable, according as we hear Him or heed Him not. Remember the parable at the close of the great Sermon, that broke over the hillside and the crowd like near thunder. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock."

XII.

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST.

"Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them."—MATTHEW xviii. 2.

XII.

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST.*

THIS is what God is doing for all the world this Christmas Day. He sets His Child in the midst. Throughout Christendom this is the central thought, the chief memory. We are gathered in wonder and worship about a cradle and a Child to sing our hymns and learn our lessons.

And this is what God is doing every day—in home and Church and school: He sets the child in the midst. This is one of the great things Christ has done. He has lifted up childhood, as He raised so many weak and despised things, and set it "in the midst." Where is the child to-day in any home or Church or circle of society? Is it not true that the child is "in the midst"—important, interesting, wonderful, surrounded by a great reverence and love and hope? Why is it that in your home the child is the centre, controlling the whole life of the household, so little, so feeble, but so interesting and so precious? Why is it that in the Church of Christ so much of our best work is given to the children?

* Preached on Christmas Day after the Sacrament of Baptism.

Why is it that the nation recognises more and more that its wealth is here, and that everything must be done to guard the children from cruelty and wrong, and to train and fit them for the life they have to live? It is to Christ we owe it. We hardly realise how different it was before He set the child in the midst, and how different it is still in many a land that has no Christmas, and no Christ to love and remember.

This is what God is doing every day—setting the child in the midst, sending in upon our rude, hard, selfish lives this heavenly influence. What a reviving, sanctifying power comes to the homes and hearts of men with the coming of little children! It is not merely a question of population—it is not merely that life is busy where death is busy, sending new souls to fill the places that are empty. There is moral and spiritual power here. There is no greater force on the side of goodness than the presence of little children. It is the cradle and the child, and all that is twined about that young sweet presence, that saves society from being scorched and withered, blighted by sheer selfishness. We may bless God when He sets the child in the midst. Many men and women have felt this—how much has come into their life with the coming of their first-born. The love of a child, reverence for a child, the constant presence, the simple teaching, the clinging trust of a little child—there is nothing like it. Hearts are held, lives are influenced, men and women are

conquered and subdued by the power of a little child. "A little child shall lead them."

"Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst of them." The scene will never be forgotten. The child came at Christ's call: and when Christ sends him back to his play, the picture he had made and the lesson he had taught abide for ever.

There were always children at hand when He wanted them. Their quick, sure instinct for sincere and loving souls drew them to Him. His kindness beamed in every look and breathed in every word. Children love those who love them, and this little child was not afraid to be taken by the hand and caught up into His arms. It is a striking object-lesson—simple, beautiful, touching, impressive. In the midst of twelve rugged men, heated, angry, quarrelling, Christ sets a little child: and the child is not afraid.

It was after the time when Christ told them of the coming Cross. The strange words hushed them for a while, but soon they recovered themselves, and soon they were away beyond the Cross, past the Passion, away to the coming Kingdom, dividing the thrones and honours. From idle dreams they passed to idle disputes: and the debate grew keen and warm and personal—who will be greatest?

"Greatest!" Christ says, "How high up? Why; don't take your seat before you are in. There is a previous question you are clearly forgetting. You

will never be in if you keep this evil and unlovely temper. You have gone past the gate, and you must turn and come back—back from your pride and passion to the lowliness of a little child." Christ set him in the midst, and bade those bearded men look at him, babe or boy, and try to be like him. Come as this child came at the call of Christ: take, as this child took, whatever place He gives you: do, as this child did, whatever He bids you. This is the way to eminence in the Kingdom; and, what is more, it is the only way to entrance, for "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter."

It was a great day when that child stood in the midst—when Christ went past the great and the learned, and chose this child, and said, "This is the nearest thing I can find on earth to what I mean—of such is the kingdom." It will save a lot of speaking, He seems to say, it will save a great deal of explaining, if you will take it like this. See this little child; try to conceive his peculiar temper and spirit and disposition. See what is childlike, and know that this is what I would bring you to, what you must come to. This is nearest the Kingdom.

Christ claimed this as the characteristic mood of Christianity. To enter the Kingdom a man must be born again when he is old and become a little child. It does not mean a return to innocence, for that is not possible; and Christ does not shut the Kingdom

against publicans and sinners. And it does not mean ignorance—a blind renouncing of intellect and a blind submission to authority. It means wonder and interest, truthfulness and trustfulness, receptiveness and responsiveness, dependence and obedience, humility and love, endless expectancy and hope.

Christ does not tell us what it means. He leaves us to think of it for ourselves—to take this seed-thought, "like little children," and imagine for ourselves what it implies. What is it that the child has, and that we have lost, which constitutes this child-likeness, this temper, which Christ welcomes because it makes easy work for Him as He brings men to God? No doubt He means us to take it in the broadest way, and there are many things that might be noted.

How *truthful* a child is! How open and frank and outspoken! He has not learned to conceal his thoughts or pretend an interest or affection which he does not feel. There is a terrible sincerity about a little child. He says just what he means, and it is not easy at first to teach him to say the thing he does not mean. And he wants you to be truthful. He takes for granted that you are. You cannot comfortably lie to a child—because he believes you.

For how *trustful* the child is! How it softens the heart when you feel it—the clinging of a little hand, the complete confidence of a child's faith! It makes us ashamed sometimes. How they trust us! Distrust comes when we get older and the spirit of

the child dies out of us. There comes suspicion, questioning, slowness to give our confidence, till you may reach that unlovely type of character, always suspicious, if not sneering at men and saying, "It is always safest to believe the worst about them"—a type of man simply hateful to any right nature. So completely may the child die out of the man, and the man depart from Christ and the Kingdom.

How trustful! Especially at home, in that life so sheltered and provided and led, what frank and confident dependence! With never a shadow of doubt or distrust, content and careless, taking a great deal for granted, and leaving it where it will surely be looked after—that is a child's wisdom and a child's wonderful rest of heart. Children are born believers: and along the lines of confidence their blessings travel. The child's instinct is to believe. It knows nothing else till the child-spirit begins to die out of it. You need to grow into unbelief.

How *receptive* a child is! The child lives eagerly, vividly, turning from one experience to another, sensitive to all, interested in all, enjoying all with a freshness and keenness that is lost in later life. Oh to be a child again, with open eye and feeling heart and intense interest in the present—missing nothing! How receptive, how willing to learn, open to new ideas, hungry for new information! It is the time of eager questioning, of intense curiosity, of the pure love of new knowledge; and this is apt to be lost. We shut the book and we learn no more. We seem

to have finished and to be satisfied. We have lost the quick interest, the keen desire for something more and something new. That is not childlike, and it is not Christian. In the days of His ministry Christ met this difficulty in many of the people He fain would have taught. As He said, "their eyes were closed and their ears stopped." He could not penetrate the obscurantism of the Pharisees with one shaft of His light, with one of His bright new ideas. How much they lost because they would not sit round like little children "hearing and asking questions!" They had lost this open-mindedness. They had shut the windows; and a child's windows are never shut.

Yes, how receptive children are! Literally, how ready to receive, to take quickly with open hand whatever you have to give, never fancying they must give something in return, and never uncomfortable because they give nothing in return. People grow away from that. "I take nothing that I don't pay for; I'm obliged to nobody; I give as much as I get and keep square accounts." Not so the child: and it fits him for the Kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace—of great gifts, as Christ tells us in the Sermon. "If ye know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more your Father in heaven!" In a kingdom of grace we need to be receptive, not pretending or contending that we pay for what we get, not unwilling to be debtors, frankly dependent—not distrustful of the heart which

bestows, as if we questioned its goodness—not finding the bounties irksome which love provides. Mark the receiving of a gift by a little child—frank and open, gladly taking it and enjoying it, unhindered by any reluctance. That is how we should be to God whose kingdom is a kingdom of grace.

And how *responsive!* A child's nature is very sensitive, very impressionable, responding to the softest touch or word or influence. There is a swift answer in smiles or tears, in hope or fear or love. The child does not fail you, as Christ knew so well, giving love for love. We lose this as life goes on. We become harder. Things do not move us or touch us as they used to do. We have lost the child's fresh feeling. And that is why in our worship and our religious life we are so dull—not sensitive, not impressed, slow to respond to God's approaches and render love for His first love.

And how *obedient!* Perhaps this is the most childlike feature. The ideal child is above all else obedient. It follows from the child's place in life—so dependent and, therefore, obedient. A child is conscious always of a greater presence, conscious of so much that is beyond itself to control, and content to trust to a higher wisdom. Then all its instincts and experiences teach it to submit, to seek guidance. It clings and is obedient. That is the temper in the kingdom of heaven where God's will is done. It is self-will that hinders, and we should all be nearer the Kingdom if we felt our dependence and, like the

child, were content to be led, to confess another wiser Will over all our ways, and to obey.

Yes, Christ says, this comes nearest to what I mean. On earth I can find nothing like this to tell the kind of character that is congenial to the Kingdom and the spirit that prevails there. This is the disposition which the Kingdom welcomes and encourages. The children seemed to be the truest of His disciples. They seemed to give Him all He desired. With a child in His arms He said: "Receive the kingdom like this child; if you have lost it, travel back and become like this child; of *such* is the kingdom."

The dangerous thing in life, and the disastrous thing, is this—that we do not keep the childlike temper as the years increase. It goes from us. The spirit of the child dies out of us.

Christ says it may come back—we may be changed, "converted"—and again He says we may be "born again." As the old Psalm promises, our youth may be renewed. This doctrine of conversion, of regeneration, of beginning life again as God's children, meets a craving of the soul, a real felt want. How many of us look back fondly to the days when we were young; and the poets tell us it is gone, the glory and the freshness passed, the light faded. There has passed a glory, not from the world only, but from ourselves. There is something we have lost, whatever we have gained in life.

There is the sense of loss: and the dimmed eyes turn away from the vision as though there were no renewal possible. We can never be young again. You know how Wordsworth dwells on this—the change and the loss and the little joy it brings "to know I'm farther off from heaven than when I was a boy."

One of our popular writers has defined genius as "the power to be a boy again at will." No doubt it is true in his own line of things, writing stories: and it is a great accomplishment in life—"the power to be a boy again at will." Goodness, Christ says, is this—the power to be a child again. We look back, catching glimpses of that old self and that old life, only to feel how far away it is, and how hopeless the effort to recover it. But this is the Gospel and the promise. Christ would not ask it, —He would not make it indispensable—if it were impossible.

He says, Let the children help you. Have you not read the story of the old miser whose mind was strangely transformed by the little child he one day found unexpectedly placed in his miserable home? And there is many another story of natures, old and hard and weary, softened and renewed by the simple companionship of a child. Let the children help you, Christ says here. Look at them, listen to them, live beside them, love them, and you will grow like them. "A little child shall lead them."

Let this Holy Child God sets in the midst to-day,

let Him help you. It is the power of His life; it is the power of His Spirit—to renew and restore and give us back what we have lost. It was the blessing He brought to the world—that old, hard, weary, worn-out world. He put new life into it. He made the world young again. It is the blessing He brings to every soul that believes in Him and loves Him and lives beside Him. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the Child; and He makes us like Himself—like "this little child"—like the child in His arms, like the child in Himself—and so, "great in the kingdom of heaven."

XIII.

POSSIBLE PERFECTION.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—MATTHEW v. 48.

XIII.

POSSIBLE PERFECTION.

THIS text is one which a great many of us leave alone. We think that this is one of those transcendent calls of Christ which are really too far above ordinary people. So, sheltering ourselves behind the general proposition that "perfection is impossible in this world," we quietly ignore the Lord's great word.

In fact, our grand mistake when we read the Sermon on the Mount is that we regard its precepts as on the whole "counsels of perfection," not capable of being translated into life and conduct. A fatal mistake truly, because nobody on earth ever spoke with such sane reasonableness as Jesus. He never demanded the impossible from anyone. Those things are possible here and now, or He would never have uttered them.

We must take the thought in its proper order; and perhaps our shrinking from the text is because we are immediately confronted with this word "perfect"; and we say, "There is no perfection in this world." But I would remind you that there are

two great words in the verse — "perfect" and "Father." The important word is "Father." Certainly the first word to think of is "Father." "Perfect" comes after that, second to that.

The principle, as you must observe, on which this precept rests is this—that every new relationship implies a new responsibility. Here is the new relationship for the soul which Christ reveals, which He makes real and effective to us—"Father." Then follows this new responsibility of likeness in the children to the Father. As I said, we know in life that every new relationship or position which we attain brings with it its peculiar responsibilities. When a man leaves home and goes out to the world to take his place among men, the world expects from him more than it does from the child beneath the shelter of home. When you enter into some new relationship to another, if there are new pleasures there are also new demands upon your thought, your sympathy, and affection. If you win a place of honour in your community, you enlarge the scope and increase the weight of the demands upon your time and strength. Each advance or change or new position or relationship brings its own requirements in its train; and they are wise who, if they win such places, are willing to pay the price.

Now it is in this way that human life becomes deepened and enriched. You may have noticed the strange transformation which a new obligation can effect even upon a commonplace nature. Has it not

been, for example, the new relationship of fatherhood or motherhood that has opened to human eyes again and again the realms of self-sacrifice and devotion which thousands would otherwise never know? And as life widens and its relationships increase, do you not find in your added responsibilities much of the inspiration and nobility of your being?

That is the principle on which Jesus lays weight here. If you become by faith and love and obedience a child of the Father, you enter the life whose peace is the deepest, but whose obligations and responsibilities are the greatest. We cannot forget that all who call God Father have the responsibilities of children. Whatever standard of conduct may content the world, "ye shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The world and your society have ways of thought, and rules and principles of conduct, which you know. But have we grasped as we should the thought that we are summoned to live, not as men live, but as God lives? For us the ideal is not human but divine. What if an imperfect way be excused on the ground that it is the way of the world, if it be not the way of heaven? If with Christ and in Christ we call God Father, let us lay to heart the obligation which is thus laid upon us, and in our earnest striving towards this ideal, let us find the secret of our best life.

This is first and fundamental—our relation to God. Perhaps we say that the reverent thing here is worship, homage. Yes, but what is worship? The perfection of worship is imitation. "The sum of religion is to imitate the God whom we worship." What are forms and ritual words, loud doxologies and humble prayers? The real heart of worship is in the growing likeness of the children to the Father whom they adore and trust and obey. This is why Paul says—"Be ye imitators of God"; and Peter—"It is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy"; and Jesus—"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect"; and this is not impossible or impracticable.

Even in Nature we can see that the laws and principles, which rule and determine the great, rule and determine the little also. A dewdrop and a planet are both spheres moulded by the same law of gravitation. That law which drew the primal star-vapour into mighty suns and worlds, and set them sweeping gloriously in ordered orbits through the expanse of space—that same law compacted and holds together the tiniest pebble at your feet. One law alike governs the ebb and flow of the vast ocean-tides, and determines the movement and shape of the ripple that breaks like a whisper on the sand of the seashore. The life that burns in an archangel has the same source as the life that shapes the modest beauty of the meadow-daisy. And in the ear of God the music that thrills in a bird's song is

one with the music of the choirs of heaven. The greatest and the least are one.

So the great God and the good man—the very characteristics of the life of God may reappear in the sentiments, thoughts, principles, the aims and efforts which rule our mind and heart and will. As the dewdrop to the star, so the tiny round of our little drops of love may be not unlike that Love which maketh the sun to rise and sendeth rain over the broad world.

That, according to Jesus Christ, is our ideal. If you are children of the Father, that is the necessary and inevitable consequence and demand. "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."

But, as I said, there are too many of us who read the injunction and leave it alone. Perfect! We stumble at the word, and say—There is nothing perfect here. And so we sit content and idle, laying the great word aside as if we had no use for it.

Let me ask you to think of this again. We have a most unfortunate habit of using certain expressions which have become proverbs, as if they were absolute and infallible truth. One expression which has become a proverb is this—we are always hearing it—"Oh, you cannot get perfection in this world." It is usually said as if the mere quoting of the proverb were the final word.

But I want to say that there is perfection in this world.

As some one says, "God does not say to the lilies of the field, 'Be perfect'; He simply makes them perfect." In the world some things are perfect in the sense that they cannot be improved upon; and Jesus asks for perfection here. He says, "There are things in which you may be perfect, if you are willing and if you try."

Now it may help us if we think of another place in which He uses this word "perfect." Once a young man came to Jesus and offered to follow Him as a disciple, and Jesus was strongly drawn to him. At the same time He had to apply His test. It happened that the young man was wealthy, and Jesus said to him, "One thing thou lackest; if thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and come, follow Me."

"If thou wouldest be perfect"—what did Jesus mean by that? Certainly not that by the mere surrender of all his possessions the man would suddenly obtain a perfect character. No; what Jesus meant was this—Give up everything for Me and for the Kingdom of God's sake; get rid of the whole of your past, and begin a new life; if you do this, then in this respect you will be perfect. That act of absolute surrender would have been perfection. The man, had he done it, could have done no more. As to his act of complete renunciation, the man

would have been perfect. And that was the perfection which Jesus asked from him then—a perfect surrender.

Or turn to the words of one of the Apostles of Jesus. St. James says—"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." Not for a moment does the Apostle mean that a man who has the complete mastery of his tongue is a man of faultless character. What he does mean is, that a person who has such mastery of himself that he says nothing to hurt any one is in that respect perfect. In that respect he can attain to nothing higher.

Now come back to the words of Jesus which are my text. Have you noticed that there He is dealing with the Christian law of forgiveness, and have you noticed also the name which He there gives to God? He says—"Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Not "Be ye perfect as God is perfect." God is perfect as a Father—perfect in His patient merciful love; and, said Jesus, it is possible in this thing to be like God. It is easy enough to love those who love you. But I ask you to seek, by God's help, the winning of that love by which you will love, not only those who have no love for you, but those who actually hate you. I ask and expect this from you, He said. By the grace of God it is possible for you. When you win this wide, gracious love, then in this respect you have won perfection. You can do no more, reach no higher; in this thing

you are like God, and "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

This word of Christ applies to every possible department of human feeling and conduct. But here it is spoken in connection with the great law of Love. To love those who love you is to be imperfect in love; but to love your enemies is to be perfect in love.

We speak of a perfect trust. There may be perfection of faith. It is not hard to take God's way and to follow Christ sometimes. When all is well with us and no darkness lies across the path, we can trust. But when God seems to lead us into cloud and storm, when the very soul is pained and weary, when duty seems to lie over a way of thorns, when life is difficult and fidelity to the right almost a crucifixion, when we are smarting under undeserved affront or nearly crushed by inexplicable sorrow, trust is not easy. Yet God asks you to trust Him always. Are ye able even so to drink of the cup that Christ drank? Can you go on believing in God, believing that God is good and His end blessed even when the night is black about you, even when the hour comes when you too must say, "Now is my soul troubled?" For that is the perfection of faith; and in this you are perfect as Christ Himself was perfect in the Garden and upon the Cross.

But here Christ points to the perfection of love. God's love is over all the world, evil and good. But

this universal love of God is not the mere benevolence of an infinite indifference. It is purity, which cannot look unmoved on wrong, still merciful; it is omnipotent love keeping silence, bearing, hoping, showing everlasting patience and mercy.

And that is the love which Jesus seeks from us—love hopeful, universal, gracious, patient, forbearing, forgiving—love that will not stay its outflow for all the grimness and ugliness of human wrath and wrong, for all the bitterness of hate. Such love is possible. Men and women have shown such love; they are showing such love to-day. Think of Catherine Booth preaching to the angry, insolent crowd, and saying, when they shamefully insulted her, when the red blood started from her cheek, "You don't know how I love you." The answer to the question as to whether such love is possible is that such love exists. Then reach that love by Christ's grace, and in love you have attained the last possible. You love like God and with God; in love you are made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Let us not turn away from this word as if it had no message for us, as if it were of no use for us to attempt the impossible. Let us begin to read the New Testament with this settled in our minds—that Christ means what He says. It is a fatal mistake—to sit before Him on the Mount and say—"These are counsels of perfection, and perfection is impossible in this world."

One thing is certain—that every word He spoke He lived out in His own life, though to live in that Divine love and goodness brought Him to the Cross. We can always turn from His precepts to His practice, and see this ideal close to our eyes and hearts in the living Christ. He was perfect as the Father is perfect. He could say: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He was constantly calling men to learn of Him, to follow Him, to be like Him; and to live like Christ is to become like God.

You cannot work with anything less than the highest ideal. And here is the wisdom of the greatest of all teachers—that He calls men to nothing short of this. His ideal was held up before all men's eyes. It was not lowered or abated before any publican or sinner. He would show the best to the worst, believing that we needs must love the highest when we see it.

Come back to what I said at the beginning. A new relationship means new responsibility. The citizens of Christ's kingdom are the sons of God. And the children are to be like the Father—in their character and their conduct and the law of their life. That is not ideal, but actual in the life of Jesus Himself. He was perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. And in our best moments we recognise that what is most worth having is the character of Christ; and that is likeness to the Father, as men may be like God.

It is an unprofitable way of spending time to discuss whether anybody reaches perfection. Certainly we would all come nearer to it if we were more honest in listening to the words of Jesus, and more earnest in looking to Him—even to Him who gives the word so serenely, because He knows He can help us to keep it, for "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Certainly nothing less than such a high ideal and goal can make St. Paul or anybody else say, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

XIV.

MASTER AND DISCIPLE.

"And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."—MATTHEW xiv. 28, 29.

XIV.

MASTER AND DISCIPLE.

IT was little wonder that the disciples cried out in terror, when they saw through the darkness the Lord's shining figure, walking calmly over the tossing waters as if on dry land. Such a thing had never happened before on earth—that a thing of solid flesh should walk upon the sea, the yielding waters firm beneath His feet. It was altogether inconceivable. But nothing stays the Christ when He is abroad on His errands of love and mercy. He places the difficulties that overwhelm the best beneath His feet.

But we are not to dwell on the miracle now. Let us think of Peter as we see him here. Peter did some grand and characteristic work that night. There was some splendid play of faith and love between him and the Master over the waters as they drew together. We would not lose this lesson for anything.

I know that the usual interpretation here, the common reading of the Apostle's experience upon the waves, ascribes to him sheer presumption in putting himself forward and expecting miraculous support in

a wilful, useless, vainglorious adventure. Surely we may find a better meaning in the story as we read it again. Does it not suggest a different picture?

Here are the disciples on the lake. Weary with the night of rowing against wind and sea, they had lost heart; and when, in the dimness of early morning, their heavy eyes discerned a Figure across the water, they took it for the spirit of the storm chasing their helpless craft. It is a spirit, they said—the spectre of the storm.

But they were reassured by the familiar tones of the Master's voice. The thought of Jesus and His great and gracious way with them came to their rescue the moment they heard His voice, and they were no longer afraid. Their hearts rebounded to joyous confidence. Peter's elastic spirit rose the highest. He longed to be side by side with Jesus—he would risk life itself to cross the billows that rolled between. All things became possible to him. He dashed away the difficulties; he did not see them. He must dare something, and do something, to express the rush of loyalty and love and devotion that comes upon him; and nothing would serve him but to be treading the waves by His side. He felt that he must, for sheer love's sake, hazard everything. At the bidding of this voice, even at a word he will throw himself into the water to come to Jesus. Such eagerness to be where He was—it was the same love which, on another morning on the same lake, sent him swim-

ming to the shore to be first at the Master's feet. He must be beside Him.

And Jesus met him with the word—"Come." The Saviour said it, not in irony, not with cold, curt permission, not with the purpose of giving Peter a lesson; all that is alien to the habit and spirit of the Master. Not so, but with a real rejoicing over the strong trust and eager love and fearless devotion, Christ bade him come; and when Peter, in bold obedience, stepped forth to the ordeal, he found his limbs borne up bravely. "He walked on the water to go to Jesus."

The chief thing here is something not to be censured but to be praised. It is not a warning—it is anything but a warning. It is not a fault only, all rashness and self-confidence and wilfulness. We say, "He boasted and fell, and Christ let him fall, let him sink for his good, to give Peter a lesson." Not at all. There are nobler elements here. There is fine feeling throbbing in the wish to cross the waves; and Christ does not check the fine, fervent spirit. He recognised the worth of it and encouraged it. "Come," He cried.

No, I cannot believe that Jesus sanctioned Peter's request for the mere purpose of giving Peter a lesson. That was not the way of Jesus. We do not find Him tempting men into danger, or exposing them to risk, for the mere sake of training. The attitude of Christ to the Twelve is all in the way of heartening and encouragement. Whenever He sees anything

worthy, He draws it out and strengthens it. He is always watching for it.

So here He sees that Peter's impulse is true, and at the heart right, and therefore to be encouraged. We see this in the evident disappointment when Peter's faith fails him, and in the fact that Peter was never rebuked for venturing out of the boat, never for daring too much.

There was welcome in the word, and the look that went with it, as Peter leaped over the side of the boat and stepped on the crystal sea. We know something of the joy that a mother feels, when her child, so long in her arms and tottering feebly about her knees, first loosens all his hold and walks alone. How her heart goes with him in the triumph of every step! So Jesus saw the venture of His disciple; and we may well believe that the light of His love and joy beamed forth in a smile of welcome to the brave man who, just to be beside his Lord, feared not to walk upon the sea. That was the kind of feeling—shall I say like a mother's pride and affection—"Lord, bid me come to Thee on the water," and He said, "Come."

Now we may leave Peter for a moment, and think of Jesus in the light of this incident.

We may take the miracle as mainly symbolical. It is a parable in action. It is a picture that seems to gather up and give us the whole life of Jesus. What He does here, He was always doing. When

He stepped calmly through the night over the troubled waters, it was an illustration of His career all through. Gennesaret was not the only sea over which He walked.

This is what it means. You see Jesus going into impossible places and doing impossible things, unhindered and unhurt—things that are impossible with men. Where others are engulfed, He treads securely and in quiet strength. Where others are overcome by dangers and difficulties, all the difficulties and dangers are beneath His feet. Many waters do not drown Him. Winds and storm cannot beat Him down. He moves on through such impossible places and experiences safe and unharmed.

We can make a picture of it for ourselves. Fill in the background of storm and night and sea, and set there that shining Figure, so calm and safe and strong. The picture is worth having, because it gives us the whole life of Jesus in the most peculiar, the most characteristic thing about it. He went into such places; He walked over such perils. The way of Jesus leads Him to do what no one ever dreamed of doing or trying to do before He came. Walking on the sea! Men say, "It is impossible; it is not practicable." Jesus steps out over the waters.

I say, this is His life. Jesus, with a quiet naturalness and a great dignity, simply goes out where human life never went before.

He said, for example, "I will teach men about

God the Father, and live among them as the Son of God"; and the very simplicity of that religion and that message wakened what worlds of opposition; and while others would have gone down out of sight and overcome, He passed securely. We see Him unshaken in His conviction, unswerving in His purpose, never unnerved in the midst of the storm, steadfast to the end.

Again He said—"I will always and in all things do the will of God, the will of My Father." He faced life with this steadfast purpose; and who can tell the storm that wakens in a man and about a man when he sets himself to do God's will, and not his own will, and not the world's will? But Jesus passed unharmed over the assaults and temptations of the world, and the mightiest motives that ever sought to make a man please himself. Here, where others sink, He walked. You cannot find an hour when He turned from the way of the Father's will.

Again He said—"Not the righteous but sinners." He looked upon the wandered and the lost, and He was moved with compassion. He went among the stained and the fallen; and tasks which others dared not attempt He accomplished. Society that others could not enter without becoming like it He sought; and we see in the Friend of sinners the sinless One we worship.

Truly, in Him life goes out into places where human life never went before—in the paths of righteousness, in faith and love and service, in ways

that are difficult, perilous, impossible. It is the miracle of the life of Jesus. He does what no one ever did before; He walks where no one ever walked before. It makes the world wonder—such a life as His. In the fourth watch of the night men saw Jesus walking on the sea.

And it is in Christ that we find the promise of redemption, the promise and the hope of a higher life for us too. There is here a revelation of the possibility, the greatness of our life too. "We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus." When men saw One who could place the troubles and dangers and fears that overwhelm us beneath His feet—One who in His own life could subdue the evil forces, even as He subdued to His service the heaving waters—One who could go forth in ways of high and holy living that seemed impossible before, they took heart, for they saw the hope of their deliverance.

That was the vision of what life might be—not at the mercy of lower forces but, by the coming of a new power, having dominion—kingly, victorious life, led forth in wondrous ways. So the hearts of men were stirred. We see not yet ourselves, but we see Jesus; and as they looked and wondered and wished, they said to the calm, radiant, royal Figure, "Lord, bid me come to Thee on the water," and through the night and the storm they heard the heartening word, "Come."

So we return to Peter, saying with the rest of us and the best of us, "Bid me come."

And Peter, stepping over the side of the boat, walked upon the sea to go to Jesus. True, his faith failed him, and he began to sink; but the few steps he made showed what might be done. Peter failed that first night, and failed again in a darker night and a heavier storm, when he wanted to walk to his Master in the hour of His Passion. But Peter did better afterwards, and walked over many waters to go to Jesus.

Peter failed, but he succeeded too; and the lesson is not in his failure but in his success. He walked at first to go to Jesus; and though he wavered and began to sink, as the crystal pavement broke beneath his feet, he recovered himself; and again he walked hand in hand with the Master as he returned to the ship.

It is a poor use to make of the story—to see in it only a warning and a weakness, a failure, a wholesome humiliation for an overbold and eager man. This scene shows something more than the weakness of a disciple's faith, even the mighty triumph of a strong faith, a faith that says:—

> "He bids me come; His voice I know,
> And boldly on the waters go,
> And brave the tempest's shock.
> O'er rude temptations now I bound,
> The billows yield a solid ground,
> The wave is firm as rock."

This is what our lesson means. Jesus asks us, and

encourages us to join Him in the difficult and strange ways on which He went. He would have us try to do the same deeds also. He would have us follow in His steps. So far as men may, He would have us repeat the story of what He did.

Peter, proud to see the Master tread with victorious footsteps the restless, devouring deep, wants to share the triumph of the deed, to walk side by side with Jesus; and Jesus encourages the wish. We can never be too bold in the religious life, nor wish to be too close to the Saviour's side. Too near to Him? It cannot be. Too much like Him in our ways of living? Impossible. This is the Sign. It shines before us in every possible peril and difficulty in our own life. The vision is our own daring hope. Whatever Christ did, wherever He went, we may follow. He says, "Come."

Oh, we hardly believe it. We do not try; we do not attempt anything great, anything heroic. We consider that life exceptional and practically impossible. That night the disciples thought they saw a spirit. It was something unreal. It was not solid flesh that moved upon the waters. It was no firm foot that was set there. But it was no spirit they saw. It was Jesus; and that clear call "Come" is a word to men who would walk even as He walked.

Spite of the encouragement of His words: "I have given you an example"—spite of His command: "Follow Me"—we are slow of heart to believe. We say, "The life of Jesus was exceptional, miraculous,

divine." We cannot attempt to follow Him; and so we leave Him to His ways and take our own. We cannot be as He was, or do as He did. But no earnest soul ever said to Him, "Lord, bid me come to Thee on the water," without the swift answer, "Come."

Christ would have us beside Him. He asks us to try the great things. As He believed in God the Father and trusted Him with a perfect trust, as He did the will of His Father in heaven, so He bids us be with Him while He walks that path. And as He loves men and labours for men, as He seeks the needy and the sinful, He would have us by His side doing the same mighty works. That great, good, gracious life of His in the whole course of it seems almost as difficult for men and women like you and me as walking on the sea. But when you know Christ, when you are truly His disciple, there are ever arising in you thoughts and feelings, impulses and desires, such as were His own; and as these impel you out into that same Christ-like life, He bids you adventure the great task. If you would go to Him on the waters, He says "Come."

But let us not forget that this higher life, this holy life, is, and must be, a life which we live with Christ. It could never have been known, never conceived as possible, had He not lived. Peter would never have had such an idea as this of walking on the sea, had he not seen Christ. It was with his eyes on Christ that he conceived the new and bold

purpose; and he would never have tried it if he could not have said, "Lord, bid me come to Thee."

And, I say, we cannot attempt the Christian life except in the fellowship of Christ. It is because we have seen Him, and how He lived, that our hearts desire it. And if we venture out on the troubled waves of life, it is because we know that we are going to One who will be with us, and who will hold us up if courage and trust fail and we begin to sink. What leads us into the Christian life at its bravest and best but an attachment to Christ like Peter's? It is the love of Christ that constraineth.

So the bluff pilot of the Galilean Lake becomes the preacher here; and we are shown this daring experiment, this illustration of faith working by love.

Therefore, obey your own heart when you would go to Christ upon the waters, when you would follow Him in high and difficult paths. "Bid me come," your heart has said; and He has answered, "Come." It is the word of a great love that would lead you into life, victorious life; and even if an hour should come when you feel as if storm and sea were too much for you, even if you feel your Christian life waning and fainting and sinking down, you will not lack the grasp of a strong hand and the mingled encouragement and rebuke and tenderness of a calm, clear voice, that only says for all our failures—"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

XV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESERVE OF STRENGTH.

"But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."—MATTHEW x. 19, 20.

XV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESERVE OF STRENGTH.

"IT shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak." Some of us have often had a very different experience. We could not get the words at the moment when they were needed. We came away crushed with the sense of our helplessness. And we look back still with a feeling of shame as we think how we failed to say the right word, as we think of the awkward, stupid silence when there might have been such speech. We have been going over the things we might have said—fine speeches, strong arguments, clever retorts, words of praise and words of sympathy. Some of them came to us when we were walking home. We had hardly turned the corner when we had the very thing we should have said, and how beautifully it went over the tongue when it was too late!

For two things may happen in such a critical hour. The situation may inspire you—the tense excitement, the unwonted circumstances, the issues hanging upon it. You may be strung up to something above your ordinary, and you may be

amazed how the words and the thoughts come to you. You may surpass yourself. Or the situation may overwhelm you, paralyse you, and make you helpless. Thought may seem to go from you, and your tongue be silent; and instead of what might have been brilliant speech, there may be dismal failure.

It is the first of these that is suggested by the text—the promise of inspiration for the great moments. The Apostles are not to think anxiously as to what they will say when they stand for trial at the bar of kings and rulers, for speech will come. Their Apologia will be given to them.

Evidently this saying of Jesus is one which was regarded as important, and which had impressed His hearers greatly, for we find it recorded in the first three Gospels—with certain variations in the setting and in the words. But the great injunction of the passage is outstandingly clear. Christ's disciples are told not to trouble themselves about what they will say or do under conditions which may arise in the future in connection with their service. They have a reserve of strength and wisdom which will be available when the time of exceptional strain arrives. "It shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

How grandly it has been fulfilled! Special crises bring special helps; and conspicuously in the circumstances which Jesus forecasts. Some of the

greatest, the most inspired of human utterances have been speeches made by men on trial for religious conviction. "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee"—from Stephen outside the city-wall to the last in China or the islands of the sea. How often have some calm simple words from some slave-girl in Roman city or some humble confessor before inquisitors been manifestly touched with heavenly light and power! How they have silenced all arguments and appeals, all threats and jeers! Verily, it has often been given to Christ's own what they were to speak for Him.

These were not prepared speeches, committed to memory and recited, but given on the spot, at the inspiration of the moment, and expressing the mood of the moment. And there is no doubt that this is the best of all speech, if you can get it—not the anxious product of the midnight oil, but the free frank speech of the moment.

So there are those who tell us we should always preach in this way; and they quote this text against us when we ask for time to read and study and prepare. Does it not say—"Take no thought"? That has not been our way here. If I were to come to this pulpit without thinking of what I was to say, and trusting to the inspiration of the moment—well, I might come, but I don't think anybody else would come; you would soon have enough of that inspired preaching.

Yet it is true, that some ignorant people and some fanatical people have read it so. But the answer is, that Christ is not referring to that at all, but to very special occasions—to the compulsory appearances of those Christian disciples at the bar of governors and kings. And the design of the instruction is to prevent the disquietude or distress which unmans. The counsel is not against thought, but against anxious thought. It is the same word as when Christ says: "Take no thought for the morrow," which is, "Be not anxious."

It is not a prohibition of thought, meditation, preparation; but only of such thought as is joined with distracting weakening care and fear. "You need not distress yourself by anxiously considering beforehand how you ought to speak before such tribunals. Be calm, collected, natural, and self-possessed; and you will be guided, you will get the words you want, which will be most impressive just because of your calmness and your fearlessness."

Jesus wants them to be calm. Notice that He refers to both *how* and *what* ye shall speak—the manner and the matter of their testimony. He knows how much depends on manner; and this is the manner He would have them cultivate. He wants them to live the simple life of trust and obedience, sincere and loyal. That is the life free from anxiety, and he who lives it is ready for all emergencies, needing not to study what he will say should a crisis arise. It would be different if it were a matter of

diplomacy, bargaining, debate; but for simple testimony to truth and Christ, the true man is always ready. In that spirit let a man stand before his judges, and he is far more likely to say the right thing, and say it well, than if he were anxiously thinking beforehand what he ought to say.

It was Jesus, who was Himself to stand before High Priest and Roman Governor, who said to the disciples: "Fear not; take no anxious thought; God will care for you and give you what you should say."

But let us find in the text the lesson there is for us all, apart from its special reference here to the Apostles. Is it not this—that we have reserves of strength and wisdom and grace which will be ours when the circumstances of our life make special calls upon us?

Let us see carefully what it is we have here in the text. What is it on which the disciples may depend? I don't think it means a sudden supernatural assistance coming from without at the moment of need. I do not think that Jesus meant to teach that, when times of extremity come, there will be a sudden and special grace sent upon us to carry us through. Indeed, I think there is something better than that for our encouragement here. We have *in us* a resource equal to any need. The difference, if I may use these words, is this—the power we trust

is not transcendent, but immanent; not coming down upon us, but rising up within us. Your strength for anything that may befall you in this life is in you already. You have it—for you have the Spirit of your Father in you. You have in your own being a reserve of power, which will rise up and be available if any unusual call should come upon you. The resources of a soul in touch with God, and inspired by His Spirit, are sufficient; and realising this you may, Christ says, preserve your soul in peace.

You know the kind of man of whom you say that he has a reserve of strength, a reserve of wisdom. He is always adequate to the situation. When the demand comes, he can meet it. Indeed, the critical times call forth his best; and we can trust him. So it is here. For yourself, a Christian disciple, living by faith in God, there is in your life a reserve of strength to fall back upon when any great need may arise; and you may trust to this.

So our Lord's words, thus preserved for us, bring to us a helpful inspiration, since they meet a well-known want of human nature. We all find it hard to avoid the habit of anticipation. We are apt to look ahead, to imagine ourselves in certain situations, and to speculate as to how we should act there. Indeed, very many good people inflict a considerable amount of self-torture on themselves in this way. They torment themselves about troubles that never

come; about difficulties that never arise; about possible failures of which they never become guilty. Of course there are, on the other hand, many light-hearted people, who live as if to-day were everything, and who are altogether disinclined to forecast and prepare. They of the ungirt loin, with no oil in their vessels with their lamps—they are unready at the hour when the summons to sudden duty strikes through their slumber or their thoughtlessness.

The better part is to realise that, while there may be such a future, it is in God's hands; meanwhile making sure of this—that God is with us; His Spirit is in us. Be not over-careful beforehand, said Jesus; if a great demand comes upon your soul, then the living Spirit of the living God in you will be your strength. Fill the present with your best; if a future waits which asks for heroism, or an unusual exercise of Christian virtue, you may rely on this: "Be not anxious in that hour what ye shall say, and what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

It is indeed a universal fact or truth, a law of Nature as well as a law of Grace. You have observed that there is in Nature a certain reserve of life or strength not always drawn upon, not always used. Beyond what is required for the usual life-activity of any living thing there is a store of

unexpended force or vitality on which it may fall back if occasion should demand. Life has, therefore, a certain power of expansiveness—a certain elasticity. More is present in any living thing than is required for the conditions and needs of ordinary existence. And this unused resource is almost always available. Your life is capable of more than you have yet asked it to do; its forces increase with the call of the emergencies. In your own experience you have verified this—for there have been times when you have surprised yourself by doing what you did not believe yourself capable of doing.

Any careful observer can watch this law of life at work. A shrub in spring-leafage is blighted by an untimely frost; and after a little you begin to see signs of revival. New leaves shoot out here and there; and the vitality of the plant begins to re-assert itself. If certain of the lower creatures are maimed, you notice how, after a little, the reserve stock of vitality comes into play to repair the damage. In our own bodies there are reserves of power unused; and the work of the physician often is to bring up these reserves; and sometimes by sheer spirit, by sheer will, the patient can call up the reserves himself.

So it is in Nature; and it is thus with our own lives. The truth is that, for the ordinary purposes and activities of life, we neither require nor use more than a part of the actual power which we possess.

There is more in each of us than any of us dream. Men and women are walking about your streets and living beside you, going on in their usual commonplace ways, who might be heroes, martyrs, or the doers of famous deeds. It is in them to do these things, only the call has never come, the stirring stimulus has never been applied to their spirits.

No one would have thought of calling the quiet girl, Grace Darling, a heroine; and yet in less than a week after a single daring act of hers the whole land rang with her name. She was capable of her splendid deed, but it would never have been done if her woman's heart had not thrilled and nerved her frail body, as she saw the few helpless human creatures clinging to the wreck of the *Forfarshire* on the outlying reef of the Farne Islands.

It is thus with many—it is thus with ourselves. Think of our soldiers and sailors—how bravely they behave when the time of action comes! And where do they come from, as they are gathered from town and country to the ranks? It is true that men who were never thought to be capable of great things have exhibited an endurance and courage and nobleness of spirit that have amazed the world. Have you not marvelled at the conduct of a crowd of people in no way remarkable above others—when, for example, a ship began to go down at sea and the cry rang out, "Women and children first to the boats," and men fold their arms and stand quietly facing death without a word? Or when a house is in flames

and a woman rushes to save her children, careless of scorching and death? The coolness and bravery, the magnanimity and self-sacrifice, of men and women just like ourselves lustre the pages of the world's long story. In more homely matters it has been so. You do not always feel a rapturous glow of affection for your dear ones, or any mighty enthusiasm for anything particular. But let illness smite your child and you will pass sleepless nights and endure incredible toil without a murmur. Let a cause appeal to you—let a sudden call come to you, and you rise to the hour. The reserve of life holds the possibility of life's greatest things. Be in touch now with the noble, the pure, the right, and the true; and as thy day, so shall thy strength be—let the day bring what it may.

Now, apply this truth as Christ does to the religious life, to your life as Christian men and women; and does it not appeal to you, and hearten you? If you have indeed received from Christ the gift of the Spirit, there is a new spiritual life in you, behind which there is an infinite reserve of power. Note this well—"The Spirit of your Father"; and Jesus says elsewhere—"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give the Holy Spirit!"

I think Christians would be calmer and more trustful if they only realised what lies within themselves; but most of us have little faith, and we

do not realise the truth. Must it not be true that if the Spirit of God is in you, then there is available for you the whole resource of infinite Godhead, the whole measureless love and might and wisdom? You do not know how your soul may expand, how every spiritual faculty in you may become reinforced, intensified, extended, until you rise above yourself to your higher self.

Apply this law of life to your religious life, for it holds with mightier meaning there, and be at peace. We trouble ourselves by picturing ourselves as in these conditions or the other conditions, and by forebodings of failure. When we read of great things done for Christ's sake, or hear of them, we sigh and say that we do not think we could do such things as these. Trials or strains are apparently before us, and we brood over them and create distress for ourselves, because we fear that we shall not be equal to the tasks.

Can we not grasp the truth? Is not God with us—is not Christ with us? If we share this Divine life, will it fail us? Should a summons to a deed which tries the courage come, will not the soul feel the glow of Christ's strong spirit? If we need patience, unweariedness of forbearing love, might of self-sacrifice, hope, wisdom, utterance—will God in the soul not prove sufficient for all these things? If a day comes when we need speech, will not the Spirit within us give the word for the moment?

Now, when no great demand is made on you, you

are not aware of any warmth of affection, or any strength of holy enthusiasm; nor are you conscious of ability equal to certain conditions. But let the testing hour come, and see what will happen then. You may trust the unseen spiritual reserve of the soul, if you are Christ's disciple indeed. He bade you be very sure of this. Be not anxious what you will say or do at the time that is not yet. If a great hour comes, it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall say or do. Meanwhile live in the close discipleship of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit, fulfilling that which is at present yours to fulfil according to the best that is in you. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves as men that wait for their Lord."

Besides all this, we are for ever in the thought and prayer of our Great High Priest, who knows us and all our fortunes. Thus it will be well with us, and we shall be equal to all that may befall us, even should that come of which Jesus spoke when He said to one of His own whom He loved: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

XVI.

DAY AND NIGHT.

"And in the day time He was teaching in the Temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the Mount which is called the Mount of Olives."—LUKE xxi. 37.

XVI.

DAY AND NIGHT.

WHEN we take the two parts of the text together, we see how the one balances the other. There is a symmetry about the verse, a fair and proper proportion. It means a life well balanced, well laid-out.

These are the two sides—the day and the night; the Temple and the Mount; society and solitude; work and prayer; the service of man and communion with God. Christ blended the two, respecting the rights of each, and not suffering the one to diminish or crowd out the other. He made room for both. He did not leave His work undone in the city that He might taste the sweeter rest of the mountain-top. He worked while it was day. And, on the other hand, He did not allow the demands of His earthly ministry to be so consuming as to leave no room for fellowship with God. Each had its proper place in that life of His, like the orderly succession of our days and nights.

Is it not true that we need in our life also this same symmetry, this proportion? We want it in character. Character that approaches to perfection

is well balanced. It is not one-sided, not over-developed in one direction and stunted and wanting in another. As in the body, so in man's higher nature, beauty requires that one part should be in keeping with another. Beauty always means fair and orderly proportion. And the secret of a well-balanced nature is a well-balanced life, a life well laid-out, a life so spent that every side of our many-sided being finds outlet and expression.

It will not do for a man to be self-centred, to give himself to self-culture, to make the most, as he thinks, of himself. There is another side of our nature that looks to others, that means fellowship and service. But still it is not enough that he should give himself to society. There is a higher side of our being that looks to God; and the soul is without stature till the man clears a space in his life for communion with the Unseen. Not by yourself and not among men, and not even before God only, but in all these together is your life well-spent.

And the secret of a well-proportioned life lies in giving its true place to prayer. Be true to God, and you cannot be false to yourself or to any one else. Give the first place, give the dominant place, to communion with God, and the rest of your life will arrange itself. So Christ blended His days and nights, His work and prayer; and what was the result? In Himself He was the fairest of the sons of men; among the multitude He went about

doing good; and before God He was the well-beloved Son.

"In the day time He was teaching." But Christ was not always working. He could not be, He had to rest; and He had various ways of resting after His work.

How often we find Him going out to Bethany, to the home and the family He loved so well! Once and again we read that He sent the multitude away. It was a relief to be free from the burdensome, turbulent crowd. "Come ye yourselves apart," He would say to the disciples. He enjoyed having them by themselves for a while. And for us too, after times of work, there is the rest and relaxation of fellowship with kindred spirits.

And often Christ found rest with Nature, in the midst of its beauty and its peace. He led His disciples out from the city to the fields; out to Gethsemane and the Garden; out to the desert place—the free open country where there were no villages and no crowds; up to the mountain-top. What a relief when we escape—out by the sea, or in the wood, or on the hill! It is like passing from the noisy streets into some great Cathedral—from the market-place to the mountain-top. Just to get away from men and look upon the quiet, restful, unchanging face of Nature, to be beyond the strife of tongues, and to listen to the silence that there is among the hills, far from a noisy and irreverent

world! There is rest for us where Christ found it—"in the Mount."

But Christ needed something loftier, nearer, intenser far. He found rest only where He found God. Nature is nothing without God. Oh, it were a poor pastime to stay out all night on Olivet if that were all! But when the mountain-top became the place of prayer, nearest to God and brightest with His presence, then the soul of Christ was soothed and satisfied and strengthened. He found rest oftenest in prayer; and there can be no rest so worthy of the soul that God has made for Himself.

How often we find Christ praying as we have it here! And how striking is this word, "He abode!" It was not so much anything He said, but simply being where He was. It was the Presence about Him. "Thou hast been our Dwelling-place," the Home of the soul, our Refuge. "Thou art my Hiding-place." We need to enlarge our thoughts about prayer. It is far more than petition, far more than words. It means communion, fellowship, abiding with God. Even a silent soul in the silence of God is satisfied and strengthened, uplifted and inspired, impressed and refreshed. So Christ rested. So He passed His last nights on earth. "He abode in the Mount."

This, then, was the place of prayer in the life of Christ. It is the place that it should have in our life too. "In the day time He was teaching in the

Temple; and at night He went out and abode in the Mount."

So keeping before us this well-balanced proportion between work and prayer, and the analogy to this in our natural life in the orderly succession of our days and nights, let us take these thoughts as helpful to ourselves.

I. Here is the remedy for our weakness and weariness; it is *the secret of strength.*

Every day we learn the lesson of our frailty. Whatever strength we have is soon spent and soon lost. It lasts but one short day. In the morning we are strong and fresh, buoyant and equal to anything; but as the hours pass our energies are tamed and quieted. The day's life exhausts us; and when night comes we are weary, and the strong man must sleep even as the infant does. So God teaches us our frailty. So He teaches us to resign ourselves every night into His keeping that He may give us back our strength. He sends us to sleep.

It is a matter of natural law, this need of rest. We work until the evening. And for the mind there is the same necessity to rest a while. When the brain is weary, and thought becomes burdensome, and we lose our fresh interest in things and our command over them, then it is time to stop. We need to learn the lesson God teaches us every night—that our power is renewed, it comes back as we give ourselves into His keeping.

We look upon that ministry of Christ, that life so active, full of enterprise, powerful and fruitful. We wonder, and ask, "How is it sustained? How does He keep it up?" And the answer is here. Every life like His in the world is fed from the mountain-top. "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." Every ministry that taxes a man's life and strength to the utmost has behind it this inner life, this upper life of communion with God. "I live by the Father."

How true it is that a man may display his power in the crowd, but he will never acquire it there! He may scatter his strength; he will not gather it again. Our work must be done in the city and with the crowd; but if that were all, our strength would soon be wasted. We need to keep a clear space in our life for quiet prayer and fellowship with God. "At night He abode in the Mount."

II. Here is the remedy for our excitement; it is *the secret of calmness.*

Here, too, the night coming after the day has its soothing and saving virtue. The morning hours are the cool, quiet hours; but as the day goes on, the stir and agitation of life is quickened; excitement rises; the strife and fever become fiercer. And when men go beyond the appointed boundaries and turn night into day, we know the kind of life they lead and how they suffer for it. And what would life be if it should go on without pause, a ceaseless

whirl and rush without anything to bring us back to calmness and collectedness again? But God sends us to sleep to break the spell and quiet our agitation and restore our souls. He takes the world away from us, and us away from the world for a while. We must let go this eager pursuit of business and of pleasure; and the fever of life is subdued and chastened and kept within bounds by God's remedy of sleep.

So, too, God gives us our times of religious worship and private prayer. There is a worldly excitement we can hardly hope to escape—the fever of covetousness, the agitation of our anxious cares, the strain and strife of keen competition, the temptation to an interest too quick and absorbing in many things. In many ways it is stirred within us, and it disquiets the soul. But God gives us at least one day in seven that we may keep it holy; and after the din of the week, how sweet is the Sabbath morning to the man who knows what it means and how to use it!

But there is a religious excitement, too, which is not good. Religious people want to be busy; and while one cannot but honour earnestness wherever one finds it, it is easy to see the danger here—how to clear a space and keep it for more intense and lonely and lofty communion with God! In this day of activity there is danger, if not of doing too much, at least of praying too little. Remember that while work may be depressing for some, it may be

rather exciting for others; and the secret of calmness is here. It was after the disciples came back from their first mission, when they had tasted a new experience and wielded an unwonted power—it was then that Christ said to them "Come ye apart." They wanted rest after their excitement as much as after their toil. They could not bear the agitations of the Christian ministry as their Master could. How calm Christ is wherever we find Him—in crowds or storms, applauded or reviled, blessing the children or bearing the Cross—always calm! It is His peace, brought down with Him from the hills and the heavens. "He abode in the Mount."

III. Here, again, we find the remedy for our little, limited ways of looking at things; it is *the secret of largeness of view.*

This is another blessing that comes to us with the night. It clears the heavens, and floods them with glory and light, and fills them with countless worlds. It leads us out into a universe infinite beyond our little dwelling-place.

The heavens are unseen by day. The very light that reveals the world below hides the world above. While the light lasts, our eyes are downward bent, all taken up with the little world about us here; and if it were always day, we should never know anything vaster. But when night comes, the earth is darkened and shaded out of sight; and the heavens are bright and wide and open above us,

and filled with worlds telling the glory of God and the glorious greatness of His Kingdom.

As we look up we get new thoughts of the infinite, the unseen, the heavenly ; and new thoughts about the earthly too. We get a new conception of size ; a new way of measuring things ; a new standard of values. Our environment is changed ; the conditions of our life are all enlarged and exalted. As God led Abraham out from his tent to look upon the glory of that Eastern sky, so at night God leads us out from the little tent-like world in which we live, that we may know the greatness of His dwelling-place.

Surely it is not hard to see how prayer must have upon the soul the same enlarging and exalting influence. It simply sets us in a new world. It changes the conditions under which we live. It brings us into the presence of God and the things that are unseen and eternal ; and under this heavenly light we get new views and true views of everything else. It sets everything under a light that is searching and truthful, that reveals everything in its true size and significance.

When we pray, we are freed from what is petty and common and vulgar ; and in the light of God we see clearly. Is it not discouraging often to listen to common criticism, to see how things are measured and appreciated and honoured here, estimated by standards that are earthly and material ? It tries us sometimes to see our Christian work despised, or

but lightly esteemed. But in the presence of God, we are freed from the tyranny of human opinion and prejudice. "It is a small thing for me to be judged of you or of man's judgment." And when we pray, we are ashamed of our weak pride and discontent, and more than reconciled to our high calling. We begin to see what is best worth living for.

Christ abode in the Mount; and what was the result? In the world He held on His way, calmly and earnestly, keeping His life and work in harmony with the unseen. He spoke of God and truth and righteousness and love; He valued the soul at an infinite price; He offered men the gift of life eternal. He lived under an open heaven where "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

IV. Here is the remedy for our insincerity; it is *the secret of reality and truthfulness* in Christian life and service. Surely a man cannot seek the presence of God if he is consciously insincere. A life that is not true is only outward. There is no inner life behind it. It has no moments on the Mount.

Here, too, the analogy holds. The night comes after the day—the quiet time when you may commune with your heart and be still. It is a time of reflection, a time of reckoning. Memory awakes, and conscience; and the day's life lies clear before us to be judged. In the light of day our interest

passes beyond ourselves, and we are taken up with what we see; but in the darkness and the silence and the solitude, we are thrown back upon ourselves. Other absorbing interests are broken, and a man has leisure to look in upon himself.

Every time of prayer has much of the same influence. It is then that we realise our individuality as we can nowhere else. We need to retire from the crowd. When our life is mingled and entangled with other lives, we lose ourselves. But to come into the presence of God and stand before Him—then I feel myself a separate being, with a responsibility all my own, and a life and a work that are mine. It is there on the Mount that I am isolated and individualised, and the weight and meaning of my own life are revealed.

And when a man is thus set by himself, he comes to be singularly free from those influences that tend to hypocrisy. It takes society to make a hypocrite; you want the market-place and the corner of the street. But with no society but God, and no public opinion but only His judgment, it is different. Before God the first question is not "Am I good?" but "Am I sincere?" "Thou desirest truth."

Prayer does test us and make us truthful. It is a kind of reckoning for us; and a man must either stop praying or be honest in his Christian life and service.

XVII.
EMPHASIS

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith."—MATTHEW xxiii. 23.

XVII.

EMPHASIS.

I TAKE this text, not because I want to discuss the text itself, but because it suggests to us a thought about life. It is itself an illustration of a principle in life—the need of preserving a proper proportion between one thing and another, and the danger of losing this sense of proportion.

This was one great complaint of Christ against the Pharisees. They made much of the things that were little and trivial, and they "omitted," left out altogether, the "weightier matters." They would "strain out the gnat." When they were pouring wine into a cup, they would pour it through a cloth of fine texture and so strain out the unclean midge —and swallow the camel. They would "tithe mint and anise and cummin," garden produce that was hardly worth noticing. They would be scrupulous and exact about such minutiæ, and sin against justice and love. Christ rebukes them in the text. He says—Don't you see that some things are great and some are little? There are larger interests in life and lesser interests—things primary and things secondary. There are differences. And the evil

and the misery come when things get out of their true places and proportions, when the little things are not little and the big things are not big. There is nothing worse than making the little things big, unless it be this—making the big things little.

It is a question of proportion—of perspective. As in a good picture, everything finds its place, nothing bulks bigger in the eye than it really is. Or it is a question of emphasis. You know that, in good reading and speaking, the weight of the voice must come upon the words according to the sense and meaning of the passage. Each sentence has some principal word or words which must be made impressive and conspicuous. When a man knows his mind and speaks his mind, the emphasis comes right. When he is in earnest, when he is angry, passionate, consumed by love or hate, he needs no lessons in elocution. The emphasis comes down right on the words because he knows what he means and what he wants to say. On the other hand, if you shift the emphasis to the wrong words, you may pervert the meaning of a sentence, and even make it ridiculous.

How true this is of life! For good living, as for good reading and speaking, it is a question of emphasis. To make life beautiful, to bring out its meaning and dignity and purpose, you must put the emphasis on the right things. And you may make life trivial, ridiculous, miserable, sinful, by placing the emphasis on the wrong things. Keep the big things

big and let the little things be little—that is the secret of a strong and happy life.

There are few things more important in life than this power of seeing things in their proper proportions; and how many people have this faculty very imperfectly developed! Their life is spoilt for lack of true emphasis.

Here is a man with a fad, a hobby, a prejudice, a grievance. You know what happens. That one thing is everything. It is uppermost in his thought. He dwells upon it all the day; he dreams of it at night. He can see nothing else for this. His whole life is put out of shape, out of proportion.

You see the way in which people allow the smallest things to concern them and excite them and distract them. How often do we become as excited, nervous, perhaps angry, over some unimportant mistake or oversight or failure as we should be over some really great fault or misfortune! What an enormous waste of human life goes on in this foolish way—waste of time and thought and nervous energy and happiness—because we fret and fume and worry over the least things.

And perhaps the worst result of putting the emphasis on the wrong things is this—that if you make trifles important, then trifles come to have for you a permanent importance. They become the world in which you live—a world of petty interests and concerns. This is a danger to which we are all

exposed, because the greater part of our life is occupied with tasks and interests that are little and commonplace. What happens if these become the great things to us? Think how the diligent housewife, concerning herself so much about every detail of her housekeeping, may fall into the way of identifying life with the little round of domestic duties, with never a glimpse of larger things and loftier interests. Think how the man who is shut up in his shop or his office and absorbed in his daily work may become the slave of routine, of minor and petty details of business, because he has not preserved the freedom of his spirit to reach up to something higher.

Certainly we may find in the text this sound principle. It is a great help to right and happy living to see things in their relative importance. "It is a great thing," it has been truly said, "to know a trifle when you meet it, and equally great, when the decisive moment comes, to see the great things and the great opportunities of life, and use them with every power of your manhood."

Now, if there is anyone who can teach us the true emphasis in life, it is Christ.

His whole controversy with the Pharisees turned upon this. It was a question of emphasis. The Pharisees put the emphasis on the outside of things —Christ on what is within. They put the emphasis on the ritual—He on the spirit. Christ did not trouble Himself about the tithing of mint, the

washing of hands and cups, the wearing of the proper garment. He wanted to change the hearts of men, to renew them in the spirit of their minds. And what was "holiness" to a Pharisee to Him was mere trifling.

He swept this away, as He would sweep away no less indignantly to-day the pitiful trifling of many to whom dresses and candles, church-millinery, questions about forms and ritual, the position of a table or a chair, are the things supremely important. Think of what it means. In presence of the weightier matters, justice and mercy and faith; in presence of grave, social problems; in presence of the ignorance and the spiritual needs of men at home and abroad, think of great churchmen solemnly concerned about things like these. Would not this same Christ sweep away indignantly that type of religion as unfit for thinking men and women, because it has lost the sense of the true importance of things?

Yes, it is Christ who can keep us right in our emphasis in life. There are great words, often on His lips, that remind us of the things He thought of most—God, soul, Father, life, Cross, righteousness, believe, love, serve, save—such things "seek ye first."

Perhaps if we would sum up in one word the lesson of Christ and the New Testament, it would be this. Put the emphasis on eternity rather than

on time—on the eternal things rather than on the things which pass and perish.

It is a safe and reasonable test of the importance of things—How do they last? And when this life of ours is laid against the background of eternity, things are brought out in their true proportions. Christ brought immortality to light; He annexed eternity to time. That light was ever shining down upon all things; and in that light they were judged. Does it not make a great difference to the worth of things, as every dying man knows, when the light of eternity is on them?

Ah! there are differences and degrees which you should learn to appreciate and discriminate. "The life is more than meat and the body than raiment." A healthy body is of primary importance—the sort of clothes you hang upon it is something quite secondary. Character is a man's supreme concern—reputation is of minor moment. A man's spiritual welfare is far beyond any worldly success that can come to him. A man says: "My business is my first consideration." That man has lost the true value of things, for it is not his business but his soul that is first. "What shall it profit a man?" You know what Christ said—because He set the emphasis on eternal things rather than on the things that pass and perish.

The greatest Scotsman of last century was Thomas Chalmers. His life was divided into two parts by a great religious experience. And looking back upon

his earlier days, when he was a brilliant student, and confessing the keen interest of such study and strenuous work, he said: "Ah! but I had forgotten two magnitudes"—he was great in Mathematics, and he said, "two magnitudes—the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity."

In this dangerous and deceitful world we are too often led astray in our thoughts of what is really important; and we need to come back to Christ and the New Testament, that we may not make this fatal mistake.

It is Christ who keeps us right here. He is the great teacher of proportion, of emphasis in the things of life. We can learn no greater lesson than to measure things as He did.

Is it not true that, when you keep your eyes open, you can see in the whole of life how men are measuring one thing against another? See the child at play; see the student at his books; see men and women in the spending of money and the spending of time; see the youth making choice of a profession; see the profligate in the riot of his pleasures; see the saint in his life of devotion and service. All these are showing where they place the emphasis in life, and what things to them are great and what are little.

So when Christ comes among us, as we listen to His teaching and follow Him through His life, can we not see that nothing is more striking about Him

than His standard of values? Is He not saying continually to the world, "My thoughts are not your thoughts"? What did He live for? What did He prize? What did He count supremely worth having? Therefore think of Him; try all your judgments by Him; live beside Him.

Yes, live beside Him. For is it not also true that, in determining what things are to be important to you, a great deal depends on the company you keep? If you want to live wisely, you must live with the wise, for the companion of fools is soon foolish too. We are mightily influenced by the society that is about us. It is not easy to resist the conventional and prevailing standards. It is not easy, even for earnest men, to scorn the judgments and verdicts of the world, and be true to the judgment of Christ. But He helps us when we live beside Him. The spirit responds to the great and noble as we find it in His teaching and His life. And in the fellowship of Christ we shall be saved from many a mistake about the worth of things. He will keep us right if we take our weights and measures from Him.

This is Christ's counsel. Seek the great things of life. Put the first things first—character before gain: duty before pleasure: treasures in heaven before treasures upon earth: righteousness and the Kingdom of God before any material good. That man cannot well go wrong whose judgments are under the control of Christ, who takes His standard of values from His words and His example, and

whose guiding principle is this—"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Christ is our Teacher; and in closing let me give you three words which you may remember.

First, I would say this. Put the emphasis on the things you believe. There is the same mixture in us all of faith and unbelief; but this is the true prayer—"Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Put forward the faith; put it first; put the emphasis there—"Lord, I believe."

This is where many go wrong. They emphasise their doubts; and that is not inspiring. It is the faith, and not the doubt, that does all the good work in the world. Run over any number of denials; there is not a particle of motive or inspiration in them. Doubt is a weak and useless thing. Life and work call for convictions.

What do you believe? However elementary, however simple, lay the emphasis there. Dwell upon it; live upon it; use it; and it will come to more and more. It will grow to greatness, if you lean your weight and live your life upon the things you do believe.

Again, I would say in the name of Christ—Put the emphasis on the bright side rather than the dark side.

There is always a bright side if you can only see it. For the Christian man, believing in God and the

great words which Christ has spoken to us, there is always a bright side, always a better reason for being in a good mood than for being in a bad mood. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Still trust in God."

The Christian is not a pessimist, but an optimist—invincibly optimistic. The outlook is always inspiring. We are saved by hope. When Christ saves us, the first thing that He saves is our hope. And this, too, inspires us for life and service. If doubt kills our energies and efforts, so too does discouragement and despair. When the heart dies, we can do no more. And it is Christ who calls us to an endless hope.

Lastly, I would say this, too, in the name of Christ—Put the emphasis on what you can give rather than on what you can get, on the things of others rather than on your own things.

This is the very mind of Christ, and we are taking our lesson in emphasis from Him. He emptied Himself, gave all He had, gave Himself for us. And who can tell the misery and the poverty of our life, because we invert the emphasis of Christ, and are consumed with a passion for getting and gathering rather than for giving—consumed by a concern about our own things and thoughtless of the things of others?

Remember what He said about the widow and her mites, and the woman who broke the flask of oint-

ment over His weary head. Can we think of Him and remain for one moment ignorant of where He would have us place the emphasis in life? Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Put the emphasis on the things you believe; on the bright side rather than the dark side; on what you can give to others rather than what you can get for yourself. Don't you see that I have just asked you to place the emphasis on the three great Christian graces—Faith and Hope and Love—these three? And, if I may add one word more, I would say this. While you emphasise them all, place the emphasis again and again and yet again upon the last. For the greatest of these, and the greatest thing in God's world, is Love.

XVIII.

THE WITHERED HAND.

"Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other."—MATTHEW xii. 13.

XVIII.

THE WITHERED HAND.

A MAN with his hand withered—and his right hand, which made it worse! Tradition says he was a stone-mason; and so the bread-winning hand was paralysed. He could not work. He was disabled—impotent and incapable among working men. The hand was withered—like a leaf that has lost the moisture and the sap of generous life; like a branch broken from the stem, the pith and strength dried out of it—shrunk and shrivelled, hanging at his side a dead thing, a lost limb. This was the case Christ had to deal with; and He cured the mason's dead hand.

Now, you are very familiar with the use that is commonly made of this story as an illustration of the act of faith—the overcoming of the inability to believe and repent and turn to God. But let me ask you to find a larger meaning in the miracle as there is a larger meaning in salvation. Salvation is wholeness, completeness, health. It means every bit of our being opened and expanded, stretched out

to its uttermost capacity and its most abundant life.

Then how are we like this man? Well, there are powers in our nature that may be strong and healthy, active and lively, or weakened and withered, paralysed and lost and dead. The body has its organs—arms and hands, limbs and members. It is through these that the life and energy within us find outlet and expression. It is through these that we live our life and do our work. It is through these that we come into contact with what is beyond ourselves. But the soul, too, has its organs. There are higher powers and faculties that are like hands and feet, like nerve and muscle to the soul. There is a higher life than the bodily life; and there are higher powers through which this higher life finds expression. We reach out to a spiritual world—a world of thought and affection, of truth and grace where God is and where all His children truly dwell. We come into contact and communion and correspondence with this inner, upper world; and there our true life lies.

Salvation means that this higher life is healthy—with undimmed eye and unabated force, with living limbs, and faculties alert, and energy unwasted. Salvation means wholeness, soundness. It means that, if our life is to be what it should be, these powers must be kept in vigorous healthy exercise. But are they not sadly withered? Are there not powers that are useless, idle, lost or being lost? Are there not many

men who are like this man—with only one arm, working with half their strength—one-sided, left-handed, half-developed men, with one side of their nature lost? And how often it is the best side, the right hand!

Do we not feel how true it is of our condition? Withered limbs, lost faculties—and in the great enterprise of life we are so far disabled and incapable. Here is a bit of your being lost—here is something you will never do—you cannot. That faculty is gone—that force abated. You are like this mason with his best hand useless. It is what we all are—crippled, maimed men and women, incapable and incomplete. We cannot do the things we would, because our hand is withered.

Perhaps I might have been a musician, a painter, a scholar—who knows?—if only I had been taken in time, if that side of my nature had been encouraged and educated and exercised. But that is past. Never called out, never stretched forth, it has withered and come to nothing; and I must sit down to the dreary reflections of a middle-aged man, and think of all the things that might have been but now can never be.

And is it not harder and sadder still to think of how the affections are wasted, and men and women who might have loved and trusted, with the gift of sympathy and tender feeling, are left impoverished, without the outlet and the opportunity that would exercise it all and make it live in strength and

beauty? And it is hardest and saddest of all when the whole spiritual side of a man's nature is withered and blighted and killed because the turning of the young heart to God was not encouraged, because the first out-reachings of faith and aspiration were checked, because that faculty was never exercised, and the man has lost it. He has now no faith, no imagination even. He cannot understand the Bible, he cannot even read poetry. He is nothing but a cold, hard, worldly man.

Try to think of it. Among the men and women you know what would they be like if all the best had come to its best? But how much of faculty and feeling has been lost—like this man's withered limb!

Now when we think of these lost powers, withered limbs, the first question is this—How may they be cured? And the lesson of the miracle is that God's cure comes, God's healing power comes, simultaneously with man's effort. The way to get back the power and the health and the hand is to use it. "Stretch it out."

There was silence in the synagogue; and then the silence was broken by this surprising command—"Stretch forth thy hand." It was a strange word to a man with such a hand. If another had said it, if some one had said it on the street or at home, "Let me see you stretch it out"—you might have seen the flush come to his brow and the tear

gather in his eye, the strong man stung in his tenderest feelings, mocked in his helplessness. But clear from the lips of the Stranger came the ringing word; and the man trusted Him who said it, believed on Him, the Healer and Helper of weak men. He took the side of Christ against the Pharisees, and took Him at His word, and ventured on it far as his will would go. And as his whole consent and will and effort and desire and intention went into it and went with it, it was done—stretched out and whole.

And this is how God saves a soul from first to last; this is how God saves and restores any of those powers of our nature. "Stretch it out" is the healing word. It is true of every faculty. By use it flourishes; it requires exercise; it grows thereby. Every bit of your body, every power of your mind, every habit of your soul, every love of your heart—all come under this law that exercise is increase. Stretch it out, and it is stronger with every inch of exercise. It is not in idleness but in effort, not in sloth but in diligence, not by neglect but by use, not in rest but in action that the powers of the soul are saved.

You say "I'll husband this, I'll rest it, I'll sit still;" and your strength is gone. No; live an active, alert life, full of eager interest and constant activity, and every power of your being grows and grows. Stretch it out, and it is strong; tie it up, and it is withered. When a man has a bit of work

to do or a game to play a fortnight hence, he does not say—"Now I'll rest my arm, I'll carry it in a sling for a fortnight, I'll take care of it till the critical hour comes." No, every day he is at his work and at his play.

It is a natural law that runs up into the spiritual world. The limb that is never stretched shrinks—muscles and sinews, oh, so soft and small! And so the powers which God gives us, unexercised and unused, fade and fail from us. "Take the talent from him"—"Thou wicked and slothful servant!" And, on the other hand, everything grows by exercise and use. The limb is not wasted by strenuous exertion. It is rather nerved and strengthened all the more. The strength increases as it is spent. The talent is multiplied as it is laid out. The hand that is stretched out is supple and sinewy and strong. "Unto him that hath shall be given."

It is the condition, the price at which He gives power to the faint. For every effort a gift of strength; with increasing effort increasing strength. You see it everywhere—from the little child learning to walk, up through every lesson and task and activity of human life. So God leads us out of our inability by our own efforts. He leads us beyond our present ability by our repeated efforts; and the impossible things become possible; and we do what we could not do, and reach what seemed far beyond us. This is God's way. It was never

giving that emptied the purse, or loving that emptied the heart, or working that made a man weak. The more you give away the more you have. Spend your strength if you would keep it; stretch out your hand if you would see it whole.

Now, let us think of how this applies in two ways. In the miracle it is a hand that is withered; and hands are *receiving* hands or *working* hands.

This is true of the soul. It has a hand. The Psalmist says, "I stretch forth my hands unto Thee." And Isaiah speaks of "stirring oneself up to take hold of God." It is true to say that the soul is a vast capacity for God, all hand to Him—a hand elastic and expansive to take hold of all that God gives, but a hand which without God shrinks and shrivels till it is gone. A lost soul—what is it but a withered hand?

Among all our capacities this is the highest—to receive God. The want of man is God—finite creature with an infinite want!—and this is his greatness. Call it faith—to know God, to rest in God, to depend on the invisible Love behind all things. Call it inspiration—to be illumined, guided, uplifted, and controlled by the Spirit of God. Call it love—the outgoing of the child's heart to God, the heavenly Father. It is our noblest possession; it is our

religion. Look into the Psalms and see what it means—"O God, Thou art my God."

And is it not true that this greatest gift may be saved and kept and increased, or may be neglected and suppressed and finally lost? How many there are who have this religious faculty withered, and who read the Psalms and can make nothing of them, so alien to their experience are the very simplicities of the soul's life with God! The capacity is lost by disuse. And the worst of it is that the more you lose it, the less you feel your loss. You do without religion, and you are content. You have laid that aside, and you say that you do not miss it, you can do without it; and you do not see that this very fact is evidence of a fearful process of degeneration in the soul. You do not feel the loss of religion because the very organ for religion is withering.

Is it true to say that this capacity is fresh and unwithered in the little child? Heaven lies about us in our infancy, and God is very near. Is it not your own experience? Your religious sense, your apprehension of God and things divine was stronger, quicker, more active and more real in childhood than it is now. You felt the reality of heavenly things as you cannot now. They have faded away and become more remote and unlikely and less impressive. How is it? You have grown in many respects. You have far more knowledge of the world, of men and books and business, but these higher things—you have not the same hold of

them. Why? There is no mystery about it. It is because you have not used the highest powers which God has given you. You have laid these aside and exercised another side of your nature. And the result is inevitable. If you treated your eyes or your hand like that, bandaged them up and kept them idle, they would wither and die. And what wonder if you lose God and faith, if you have nothing to see with, and nothing to grasp with, when you never use the eyes and the hands of your soul!

Oh, if you would keep it, use it! Stretch it out —this hand of faith. Stretch forth thy hand to God; stir thyself up to take hold on God. Open thy soul like an outstretched hand, like a flower turning to the sun. Open your nature to thoughts of God, to the consciousness of His presence and His providence, to the contemplation of His truth and love, to the vision of His glory and grace in Christ. Make the most of every thought and impression and impulse toward God and spiritual things. Neglect it, and it is gone; but stretch it out, and it will increase. It will gain strength from hour to hour, and wake up each sluggish dormant faculty, till the whole nature is alive with the stirrings and strivings of life, and every avenue of your being is wide open to God.

And there are *working* hands as well as receiving hands. So it is here. Tradition says the man was a stone-mason, and he asked for the cure because he

wanted to work, not to beg. And when the cure came, he went back to his craft; and he stretched out his hand again and again in many a bit of honest work. Many a square yard of solid masonry was built by that same withered hand that Christ had healed.

The world needs workers, and God needs workers. There is so much to be done. It is the summons of the morning sun—"Man goeth forth to his work." And what a noble thing it is! God asks for it every day; and He has given us hands for it; hand and power He gives. He does not send us to work without weapons. And was there ever such an instrument as yourself, in faculty, in talent, in powers? Or this bit of yourself—a man's right hand? What a marvellous instrument! How much it can do! What weapons it can wield—pen and sword, trowel and hammer, chisel and brush, the reins and the sceptre! What industries, what dexterities, what achievements! The world's wealth is in its working hands where the skill is stored—not idle hands, soft hands, but hands that are strong and sinewy and supple. And a withered hand—it is the ruin of the best. Say to this man—"Lend me a hand, stretch it out"; and the tears come to the poor man's eyes at the sight of its withered weakness.

It is a picture of that infirmity, whatever it be, which destroys a man's usefulness, his power of doing anything well in this world of ours where men must work. It is whatever deprives a man of the

power of good work, whatever is withering up his energies, paralysing his usefulness, hindering him from service.

Christ heals the dead hand—that is the happy message of this miracle; and He does it—along the line of your own endeavours. As you so trust Him that you work with Him, and will what He wills, and do what He commands, however impossible the task seems, He will lift you over the impossibility, and take you far beyond your own ability if you once launch out in His service. There is nothing so enabling as obedience to Christ—nothing so uplifting as when you venture to do something big, something wonderful, because He has told you to do it. Then you laugh at impossibilities. You say, "I cannot do it? Why, I must do it, I will do it"; and by the grace of God it is done.

Launch out, forgetting yourself and your weakness, and you will be surprised and delighted as the power comes. Stretch out your lame limbs, and they will take on the colour and the soundness of health, and develop a strange skill for good and gentle ministries. Stretch out even your weak, withered hand to serve, and strength will be made perfect in weakness. Even as you will to do His will, the strength is yours.

Life is loss or gain. It is the wasting and the losing, or the gaining and the growing of spiritual power. Nothing else matters very much. Does it

not give a new meaning to this word "lost"—a lost soul—in its powers and faculties lost? It is a process often in full career and operation now. These are the solemn days—not some one Day of Judgment far away. We are gaining or losing now. We live for better or worse. As we stand in the presence of Christ, we are keeping our withered limbs, our own poor life; or we are taking what He will give us—"life abundantly."

XIX.

THINGS THAT ARE PRICELESS.

"For it might have been sold."—MARK xiv. 5.

XIX.

THINGS THAT ARE PRICELESS.

THERE is no doubt that a great part of our life comes under this head of buying and selling; and a great deal of character is revealed just here—in the things we think we can buy and the things we are ready to sell.

A curious feeling comes to us when some things are sold. Browning Love-letters—it seems a kind of sacrilege. The Family Bible—I have seen it in a pawnbroker's window. Family treasures and heir-looms—it is pathetic in the auction-room when they go to the hammer. And the slave-market—what must that have been!

There are things that seem to be above all price. David felt this of the water brought by men who, for love of their young leader, hazarded their lives. He felt that it was above price. It was not water; it was blood. As the song says of the caller herring—"Ca' them lives o' men." See what it all means; and though you may barter this in the market, there is something in it of such worth that it cannot be priced and sold.

Yet what is in the market in this world! A man may sell his honour, sell his country, sell his good name. Man or woman may part with something that is more precious than life itself. Even the Christ Himself was sold for silver; and it was the man who took the thirty pieces from the priests who said of Mary's costly adoration—"It might have been sold."

Surely there is a coarseness here which mars the beauty of the whole beautiful incident. This remark of Judas is like a harsh, discordant note heard in the midst of exquisite music. Judas entirely fails to comprehend the significance, the beauty, and the worth of what he sees.

This was what Mary did—you know the story well. She turned her adoring face to her Lord with a love which comprehended His sorrow and His danger when even the Twelve were blind. She loved Him so—the best was not too good for Him. She gave away everything she had for the purpose of expressing her love; and if she had had more, she would have spent it all. She took her costliest possession, the alabaster flask of fragrant ointment; and she broke the narrow-necked vase, that the contents might be poured out to the last drop; and the house was filled with the sweetness.

This was what Mary did; and this was what Judas said—"It might have been sold." He had been watching Mary. He had seen her bring forth

the flask. He had measured its size, estimated the quantity and the quality, figured up the price of it; and then came the question—"Why was it not sold? It might have been sold;" and it was "wasted" because it was not sold. Ah! what can we say but this? There are differences among us in the richness or the poverty of our nature. "Mary would not be Mary if Judas understood her."

But there was One who understood, and estimated very differently.

We can fancy how Mary was probably puzzled by the question—Why did you not sell it, why thus throw it away, did you think what you were doing? You can see in her face and in her eyes how Mary would be dazed and puzzled by such questions. She could not in the least have explained why she did it. It was impulsive. She was not thinking but feeling, and letting her feelings go. It was all feeling, passion, heart. Hers was not the cool, calculating head that could figure it up. And when they asked her why she did it, such an extravagant thing, she could not tell.

But there was One who knew Mary's meaning, not only better than they knew it, but better than she knew it herself. And it was precisely the lack of calculation in it that made Him praise it. If prudential considerations and calculations had come into it, if she had been thinking of its pence value,

it would not have been the same. Jesus would not have received the same impression of overwhelming love. His whole being was blessed by the outpouring of this human love; and the comfort and the joy of it lay in the absolute unsparingness of the gift. Everything that could be given was given. It all went without one calculating thought.

And what satisfied Him satisfied the woman too. One touch of self-consideration, one hesitating, calculating question—and her own heart would not have been satisfied in it. This was the joy of it; and there was never a thought of its money equivalent, or the comfort it might have brought her if she had saved it and sold it.

Jesus said that it was "a good work," a beautiful, noble work; and the beauty and the worth of it were in this—its uncalculating extravagance.

> "Give all thou canst; High Heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely-calculated less or more."

Now there are two lessons which I would give you—one from Mary and one from Judas.

From Mary let us learn how we enlarge the worth of our possessions, whatever these may be.

Judas said, "It might have been sold"—as if it were only a matter of alabaster and spikenard. But there was far more here than ointment. There was love. It was no longer ointment. It was changed into the costly tenderness and love of a woman's

heart; and as such it could not be priced or sold. Money could not measure its worth.

Now we may regard our possessions in either of two aspects. They may represent to us so much material equivalent, so much money-value. I may say of any ability or education which I possess—"This ought to bring me so much in the market." I may say of anything that I possess, houses or lands, pictures or books—"These are worth so much, they would bring me so much in money." That is one aspect. But we have all a dim sense of higher values. We see another side of it. When these things are given for the good of others, we see at once a new value in them.

I daresay it is too often the material price that counts with us. One man, for example, dedicates his life to a great cause; and there are those who say that "surely there is no need for thus wasting an ability which might have won him fame and fortune." I have heard it said of a great Churchman—"He might have been Lord Chancellor." If he had gone to the Bar, what a fortune might have been his! "It might have been sold." Think of David Livingstone; take away from him his missionary work; let him go into Africa, as other men have gone, for gold and diamonds. He might have been a millionaire—what a fortune his! "It might have been sold."

Let no one fancy that I am hinting that the world's method of life is anything but sound. We

live by such exchange—by buying and selling. As I said, it is a great part of our life. But the point which I wish to emphasise is this—that there is possible for us an enlargement of whatever is ours which raises it above all price, which brings it into the region of the priceless things.

You may easily test this for yourselves in regard to any definite thing. Sell it or give it—do you feel the difference? Which makes life richer—a bargain or a gift? Take it to the market and turn it into money, or take it into life and spend it in service; and how do you feel about it? Which is the richer use for that possession, and the loftier value? In the life of another and in your own life, do you not thus enlarge and enhance the worth of your possessions?

Mary's vase of perfume was, Judas said, worth more than three hundred denarii, more than ten pounds in our money; and he was probably correct. Yes, but her own great love was mingled with that sweetness, and the ointment thus enriched was poured out. It went away to bless the dying Saviour, and to carry its eloquent message of love and sacrifice for His sake. That ointment thus poured forth—who in heaven or earth save God can estimate its worth?

It is thus that man's possessions are placed beyond all earthly values. We, too, can infuse what is ours with the same divine spirit, and so enhance its value immeasurably in the eyes of Heaven.

You may be a workman, your work worth so many shillings a week in the market. It may be worth infinitely more. Put character into it, spirit into it, love into it. Let that work be charged with purpose and feeling, character and aim, generous thought and unselfish love. Say in your heart—"I will make this work, done in the sweat of my brow, and for my daily bread, a service of the highest ends also; I will try so to work that other lives on earth may be blessed and helped by me and my work"—that is the secret of ennobling all you do. No earthly standard then can measure your work; no common wage can really reward it. You are giving that of which no man can truly say—"It might have been sold."

It is perhaps more evident in some lines of life than in others. In the work of a teacher, for example. His training, his special gifts and abilities, his daily work in school, all his influence upon his pupils—these give him his place and so bring him his salary, for the world knows something of their real value. But who does not see that, when that work is done in the true spirit, and when it accomplishes the highest ends, it takes on a value beyond all material measurement? It is a matter of life and spirit, of love to men and loyalty to God; and the fruit of it is away in the far-off years, in the moulding of men and women; and it can never be paid, and so never be sold.

In my own line of life, if I may refer to it, no man

can do his work at all if he does it merely for the sake of his stipend and in return for what is paid him. He must give that which can never be sold. He must give himself, his own soul in love, else he does not do his work at all. You cannot say of what he gives—"It might have been sold."

And have we not seen it often in humble ways? A faithful servant; an old nurse; we have known such instances of lifelong devotion, of real love and friendship and loyalty for more than a generation. Where in that relation does money come in? The wage looks ridiculous beside the life that can never be paid for. This is something that cannot be bought or sold.

It is true of your work and mine, whatever it be. You can get a price for it in gold; but filling your work with a fine spirit of love and faithfulness, and offering it to the service and the well-being of men, it passes to the place of the things that cannot be sold.

> "All that the world's coarse thumb
> And finger failed to plumb,
> So passed in making up the man's amount" —

that inner life of thought and love which men do not see:—

> "This I was worth to God."

We enlarge the worth of our possessions when we spend them, as Mary did, in love.

The lesson from Judas is this. Here is a man who

is blind to the higher values, blind to the spiritual values. Here is a man who measures by the pence value and so misses the priceless things.

We do want to think of love and prayer, righteousness and purity, beauty and truth, God and the immortal spirit of man. For the difference among men lies in their appreciation of the priceless things. Judas represents not only the covetous, the penurious, the careful, calculating, grudging and saving who say, "Why this waste? It might have been sold"; Judas represents not these only, but the hard, material, unspiritual who are far from Christ and His thoughts and standards.

They would measure things by results, as they say, meaning the money-balance. They would measure things by utilities, meaning things that help a man to get on in the world. They speak about useful information, useful knowledge—you know the kind of books that serve up useful knowledge. So they speak about education. Shall we teach arithmetic? Certainly. Mental arithmetic —what would a boy be worth in this world without mental arithmetic? Here is Judas at his mental arithmetic. But classics, poetry, music, art? It is not so evident how these can be turned into money. But education is for the enrichment of life; and there is a life that is more than meat or money, more than the abundance of the things which a man possesses.

We do not wish the lower things to blind us to

the higher things as Judas was blind here. Judas looked with unseeing eyes and with unfeeling heart. He never saw the gift that Mary gave to Jesus in that hour. He was blind to it—blind to the best of life, the priceless best. As one has said, "The fact that he priced the gift proves that he never saw it; to have seen it was to have known that it was priceless."

Judas knew the market-price of things. He knew about spikenard. But there was more than spikenard here; and that something more than spikenard he could not see. So the covetous, unspiritual, earthly-minded man is always missing the richest and the best. A man's life consisteth not of the things which worldly men price and value, but of the things which transcend all money-measurement. By these things men live—by vision, truth, beauty, love, sympathy, holiness, peace of conscience, hope; and to miss these is to make life poor indeed.

These are the priceless things, the things that cannot be bought and sold. You buy a book, but there is something in the book which you cannot buy. You buy a book, and the book is yours in its material form and substance—the book of the printer and binder, but not the book of the poet or the thinker. There is something here which you may miss, which you may never see and never taste even when the book is in your hand; and that something is the priceless thing about the book. So of the

best of books. You say perhaps—"I have bought a Bible." Have you? You paid so much for the Bible which lies before you now, but not a man among you ever bought the Bible. It has that for you and me of which neither man nor angel can say—"It might have been sold." So of high thoughts and love and happiness and peace and the visions of faith and hope. By these things men live; and they are not sold, but freely given.

"Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in;
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us;
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy for a whole soul's tasking:
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking;
No price is set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer."

Yes, the best things are not sold. They are given—ay, given not because they are cheap, but because they are priceless and nobody can ever pay for them.

The things that save us are not sold. They are the things of which one cried—"Come ye, buy and eat without money and without price."

Ah! we know all this; we know that Christ is precious; we speak of His unsearchable riches; and He is the gift of God. We go far from the truth when we introduce commercial ideas into God's

salvation, any element of purchase or payment or equivalent. We shall never know the might and wonder of God's salvation until we take it as the unconditioned gift of the eternal love of God. It could not be bought; it comes by Jesus Christ—through that marvel of a life broken in death like the vase of Mary. It is not bought; it cannot be sold.

"Nothing in my hand I bring."

Know that truth of free and saving love in Jesus Christ, and you know the power that can change your life into the image and spirit of Jesus. And that change has passed upon you when, with a glad and grateful heart, you are ready, as Mary was, to spend and be spent for your Lord.

XX.

CREED AND CONDUCT.

"Sound doctrine."—TITUS ii. 1.

XX.

CREED AND CONDUCT.

IF you and I had been here a generation ago, or if I had been preaching to your grandfathers and grandmothers instead of to you, I would no doubt have heard much more of this great word "sound doctrine." It used to be a common question—Is he sound? But we rather dislike it now, and resent it. Our interest takes another direction, and we think it rather a poor thing merely to ask—Is his sermon in harmony with some accepted standard? Does he say the things he is expected to say? Does he repeat frequently and faithfully the approved formulas? No, we rather say—Is his teaching good to listen to and good to live by? Is it impressive, convincing, inspiring? What is its practical influence and result? What kind of men does it make?

And when you have said this, you have simply corrected the translation here, and found your way to what the Apostle meant when he said—not "sound doctrine" but wholesome, "healthy teaching."

This is an expression used in the Pastoral Epistles and not elsewhere in the New Testament—"sound

words," "sound doctrine." We find it some half a dozen times in these letters to Timothy and Titus. In the English Version it is translated "sound," a word which in the early Seventeenth Century meant "healthy." A sound body is a healthy body; and "healthy" is the Greek word.

But as the expression has come to be used among us, our common use hides its real meaning and its lessons. When we speak of "sound doctrine," we do not connect it with the idea of health at all. We mean "orthodox," "correct." That is not St. Paul's thought. There were no creeds in St. Paul's time, and he is not thinking of a cast-iron creed, and we go far from his thoughts when we say in our sense of the words, "sound doctrine."

"Sound doctrine," of course, is different to different people. "Sound doctrine" is *my* doctrine. Orthodoxy is my "doxy." The Presbyterian appeals to the Westminster Confession and Catechism; the Methodist to John Wesley's Sermons; the Episcopalian to the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. And what is sound doctrine changes with the changing standard. Take the text in this use of it, and what a plunge into controversy, into theological dispute! What bitter feelings and what harsh judgments! How easy sometimes in some places it has been to condemn a man by this whispered word—"Ah! but he is not sound."

All this is away from what St. Paul meant. Say "healthy, wholesome teaching," and you are in

another world. The Apostle is not describing the teaching which he had given to Timothy and Titus as correct according to some standard, but as healthy and health-giving. It is our word "hygienic"—the Greek word in English dress. According to St. Paul, "sound doctrine" is not teaching that has the conventional ring, familiar as the lilt of an old song; it is whatever tends to build up strong men and women, whatever brings a healthy colour to the cheek, and a healthy vigour to the limbs, and a buoyant, beautiful life to the soul.

We gather this from the context. See what such teaching makes of men and women, young and old; it tends to happy social relations; it helps men to live a true life in the world. These valuable, commonplace virtues, these are the things that befit, "that become sound doctrine." And when, on another page, St. Paul gives us the black list of things that are "contrary to sound doctrine," what do we find? Not heresies, as we might suppose, but vices. These are the things that are "against sound doctrine"; and the doers of such dark deeds are those who "will not endure sound doctrine," for sound doctrine is healthy teaching.

Think of Christ Himself. His teaching was not sound according to the accepted standards of His day. To the leaders of His Church and the teachers of theology in His time it was a hated heresy. Christ's teaching was not "sound," but it was healthy. "His word was with power." "The words

that I speak," He said, "they are spirit and they are life." And this is always the true test to apply to religious teaching. That is sound doctrine which makes good men.

Is it not a fine phrase—"healthy teaching," "wholesome words"? It is what we want everywhere—in school and college, in the newspaper and on the platform, in literature and in life, in politics as well as in religion. And we know it when we get it. This is beyond all controversy. We have an instinct for what is wholesome and a clear consciousness of what is healthful; and this is Christianity as St. Paul presents it—a sound, robust, healthy message, good every way, clear in its principles, practical in its aims, ready to be judged by the life it makes and the man it makes. "By their fruits ye shall know them"—in this practical, ethical way.

This was what St. Paul saw with his own eyes in heathen cities. He went about among communities of Christians, and he saw the type of character that was formed by the faith of Christ. He saw what men and women came to be when they had really yielded up their lives to be fashioned by the truth. He watched, year after year, that miracle of Christian history, the making and the training, the growth of the Christian character. He could not miss the contrast between truth and error, superstition and faith, Paganism and Christianity in their moral product. See the Christian in the heathen life

surrounding him; see the life in those who were gathered and sheltered beside Christ and the Cross; see those slaves degraded and despised, but redeemed and made truthful, honest, modest, temperate. The Gospel inspired a nobler temper. It restored the authority of Divine law, the awful sense of the evil of sin and the preciousness of personal purity and self-sacrificing love. It brought the new conception of character, of goodness, of sanctity which Christ created, brought it even to those degraded souls sunk so low in heathen darkness and sin. What simplicity and sincerity, what strength, what self-control! What a miracle of ethical achievement! No wonder that St. Paul could say of the Gospel which he preached that it was marvellously healthy.

Now, this interesting phrase suggests and rests upon the close and necessary connection between creed and conduct, doctrine and life.

Perhaps it is not unnatural that there should be a kind of recoil from dogma or creed to-day, because of the exaggerated importance given to it in the past. You know that to hold the correct creed has too often been accepted as a substitute for living the right life. Ours is an age intensely practical, and we are disposed to judge men by conduct rather than by creed. We are fond of quoting the tolerant epigram of Pope that "he can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

But we are foolish indeed if we say that it matters not what a man believes, if we fancy that any man's life can be right unless his thought is right. Belief is the beginning of conduct. As a man thinks, so will he act. Belief cannot be divorced from life. In the long run, faith and life will harmonise. For thought and action are different attitudes of the same personality. The man who thinks is the man who acts; and what we think, that we are. It is foolish to expect anything else.

This is something which we cannot escape—doctrine and practice inevitably harmonise. If a man does not believe that God is, if he does not believe that there is a hereafter, inevitably his life is affected by his unbelief. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." It is impossible to separate doctrine and conduct, and impossible to separate Christian doctrine and Christian conduct. What was it that created the Christian type of character, so different from anything pagan? What was it that created the Christian virtues of humility and purity and self-sacrifice? It is the Christ of St. Paul and St. John, the Christ of the Catholic Creeds, who has been the Author of all that purity and tenderness and love which have made Christian morality a new thing in the world. What God has joined, you cannot put asunder.

Surely we find it so in the New Testament. The Gospels and Epistles abound in ethical teaching. But all that is thus practical is inseparably bound

up with what is doctrinal. You cannot disentangle them, taking the one and leaving the other. Again and again we find this. Think of the Epistle to the Romans. This is doctrinal, you say, if any bit of the New Testament is. Yes; but at the twelfth chapter see how it passes from doctrine to practice. "I beseech you, *therefore*." The practice follows from the theology. Therefore it follows; this follows—"your reasonable service." Read on and see what it means in Christian manhood and Christian character. What dignity and purity and love, what patient wisdom and self-control! Sound doctrine means fair living.

Or take the crowning instance, what I take to be the classic passage, in the second chapter of Philippians. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, humbled Himself." It is the sublimest statement of Christian doctrine, the doctrine of the Incarnation and of the Person of Christ. Put it into propositions, and you would say that it is tremendously doctrinal. Yet why is it here? Not in the interest of doctrine at all, but of practice. It is to make the Philippians ashamed of their strife and vainglory. It is to make them see and copy the meekness and lowliness of Christ. See what Christ was and what He did, and did for you. Think of what it means—this kind of disposition which was in the Eternal Son of God, and which brought Him down from heaven to help us. What a result it would be if Christian

men and women had this mind, a love like this which stops at nothing, stoops to anything, surrenders everything! If Christians were like this, what would happen? This is healthy teaching.

When St. Paul thought of this doctrine that was healthy, he knew where to find it. He found it in the Gospel of Christ, in the truth as it is in Jesus. And is not this the witness of history and experience? Wherever this teaching has come, its influence and effect have been such that life has been lifted. All through the generations what has the Gospel of Christ been doing for the world's life? Even those who can speak against it—where would they have been without it? Has the world seen anything fairer than Christian character? And the Christian conscience—what would the world's life be without that? The Christian ideal is undoubtedly above the common—a standard, a rebuke or an inspiration; and whatever is loftier in our life, in truth and purity and unselfish love, we owe to this "healthy teaching."

Is not such moral power to be expected from this Gospel? Think it out, and you must see how every element in Christian teaching constrains and persuades and enables to a better life. This teaching tells of pardon and peace with God—how this heals, and helps, and makes all things possible! It sets before us Christ the perfect Example; it lays upon us love, the mightiest of motives; it opens to

us the infinite outlook, the solemn certainties of the eternal world. It assures us of a Divine Spirit and Power with us in every upward endeavour; and this is what we need—power, dynamic.

I say, think of what is contained in Christian teaching, and see how it tells on the life that is open to its influence, so that Dr. Chalmers could say, "To preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches." He saw it in his own experience. He saw the dreary failure of "Moderatism" to touch the life of the people, because it was the preaching of morality without Christ. Morality is good, said Chalmers, but "to preach Christ is to preach morality in all its branches."

Now, if you thought that in what I said at the beginning I meant to disparage doctrine, I hope you see that you were much mistaken. Certainly doctrine is of little worth apart from practice; but practice is not possible without doctrine. What St. Paul means to say is this—that doctrine and practice must go together. If you lose your hold of the truth of Christ, then the standard of your own life will decline. Tighten your grasp of Christian truth, feel the force of it, and every bit of your life will be the better for it.

There is no proof of Christian doctrine like this. Ours is a questioning age, and we need men who can buttress and defend the faith, who can show it still reasonable and well-grounded. But the

mightiest argument is here. The evidence of character has been the strongest force that has drawn men and women to Christ. It is still the force that keeps many a man a Christian at heart when difficulties of belief are pressing hard upon him. It commends the doctrine; it adorns the doctrine—to see its power in life and character.

Each one of us may be humble and kind and honest and true, may be, by the grace of God, in some ways Christ-like. In some humble way each one of us may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, proving that it is good to listen to and good to live by, that this is healthy teaching, that these are wholesome words, even the words of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

XXI.

THE BREATH OF SPRING.

"Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"—PSALM lxxxv. 6.

XXI.

THE BREATH OF SPRING.

WE are very different, one from another, in the measure of our sympathy with the world about us, and our sensitiveness to the changes that come across it. But even the most forgetful of us and the least sensitive are awakened and impressed when the year is changing—in Spring days and Autumn days, the sweetest and the saddest of the seasons.

Now the text is a text for the Springtime, when we feel the thrill of new life and hope in our hearts. "Wilt Thou not revive us again?" Thou art reviving everything. The whole world is waking out of its sleep. Every spot is teeming with new life. Every clod of earth is stirring at the touch of life, and every buried seed and every little bud in field and hedgerow is breaking and bursting forth with new life. The prayer leaps to our lips as we feel it all about us—this rising, rushing tide of life; and we say, "Let the breath of Spring breathe on me; let the stream of life come in upon me." We would share it; we would be in sympathy with it; we would rejoice in it. It is more life and fuller that

we want. "Wilt Thou not revive us again?" "Thou renewest the face of the earth." "Thou visitest the earth," and "lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

The Winter is past. This is the peculiar note of the Springtime, the note of emancipation and release and reviving. It is the loosening and liberating of the earth from the cold chains and fetters that have held it for so long. Winter is reluctant to go, tenacious of its grasp; but it has to yield to the new spirit that is abroad; and all things rejoice at their release. It is a freer, gladder world. Let the days sing to us a song of new life and promise; let them tell of the love that makes all things new.

Ah! but how hard it must be to be shut out from it all, and to feel that this is not for me! Is it not sad to be sick in the Springtime, when life is low and faint, when the colour goes from the cheek, and the spring and strength from the limbs, and you are spent and feeble amid all this abundant life? And hard it must be to die in such days, in all the joy and pride of the Spring, with the breath of it on the wasted cheek, to be lingering and sinking. What a world it is to leave, and what a loveliness never to see! And hard it is to feel in the Springtime that your life has lost its freshness and buoyancy and hope. To be worried and wearied, depressed and

discouraged, listless and useless and sad, when life is low and languid, and there is nothing within that answers to the fresh, radiant, abundant life around us—what can we do but cry to God who sends the Springtime over His rejoicing world? "Wilt Thou not revive us again?"

Now, when we take the text along with the Springtime and try to see what such reviving means we find that it is not the beginning of life, but the increase of life. Reviving is not the giving of life where there is no life, but the giving of more life where life is low and little. It is the stirring, the quickening, the waking of life that is dull and dormant, the liberating of life that is bound and confined—and the fettered life is free.

This is the lesson for us. Wherever there is life it has its seasons, its varying fortunes, its reverses and revivings. It comes and goes, and ebbs and flows, and rises and declines. There are forces that are on the side of life; and there are forces that are against it. Sometimes life seems to be defeated and diminished, and driven in upon itself, and reduced to its lowest and its least; and sometimes life is triumphant and free, it cannot be held or hindered, and it pours itself forth in a wealth and glory that are wonderful.

I say, this is the lesson for us who have only a little life, who are living but not lively, who have life but have it not abundantly. See the triumph

God prepares even for the life that is low and little —"Wilt Thou not revive us again?"

Certainly there is a great revival all about us every year when the Springtime comes, when the great tide of bursting, rushing life sweeps over field and fell and forest. There is a mighty contrast between the earth as we see it in Winter, held in the grip of the frost, covered by the snow, with scarcely a sign of life on all its surface, and the same earth as we see it again when Spring comes smiling over the land.

But, remember, this is not life out of death; it is the awakening of life that was asleep, the quickening of life that was buried, hidden but none the less there. The trees may be black and bare, and the earth hard, so that it rings like iron under your heel, and the land laid waste and desolate. But these are not dead. There is life in every tree and shrub, and there is life in the land. There are roots in the soil, and seeds buried beneath the snows, that hold within them safely something that will awaken at the warm, soft touch of Spring sunshine and Spring showers. The roots will revive, and the seeds will burst, and the tender grass and the flowers will come again when gloomy Winter is away.

No! This is not the creation of new life out of death. The world is never dead. Between the bleakest day in January and the brightest day in June there is one continuous thread and stream of

life ; and all the abundant increase that makes the glorious pageant of Summer may be traced back to seeds and roots that never lost their life through all the dark days of Winter. It is not the creation of new life out of death, but the awakening, the quickening of more abundant life out of the life that was diminished and dormant and hidden. It is not a birth but a reviving.

The yearly miracle of Spring is a miracle of reviving life. The coming of Spring is the coming of life in full flood-tide. Life is teeming, heaving, throbbing everywhere. No ocean-tide has ever rolled in upon its shores so proudly, so grandly, so full in volume, as the tide of life that has now touched our world. It throws up its spray in myriads of flowers. It rolls up its waves in mighty forests, and spreads them out over broad green fields. No thoughtful man can watch it without wonder—this immense flood of life !

It is a living world. How much of it is living ! When you look across some wide and lovely landscape do you ever say—How much of this is living, made by life, and if the life were killed what a dull, drab, dreary desert of rock and sand ! It is life that changes it, colours it, fills it, and furnishes it. All the beauty in the green grass and the opening flowers and the purple hills and the waving woods—it is life that makes it. To carpet one meadow with grass and daisies, or cover one hillside with heather or whin—what life is there ! And the music of it

in the hum of insects and the rustling of leaves and the singing of birds—it is life that makes the music. It is a living world; and all this from the little life that was hidden and silent through the Winter, defeated and diminished and put out of sight.

So it is in the glory of the Springtime. What gloomy and unpromising places it rises out of! See the bare, bleak beds of earth, and the trees stretching out their gaunt and naked limbs, and the bushes stripped and clipped and pruned to the bone, and all the flowers that have died down to the root. Then imagine the resurrection, the emancipation! They are loosened and let go. What a liberty is life! What energies unbound, unfettered! What a release, what a reviving!

Can we not come into sympathy with this waking, quickening world, and rejoice in this message? There is reviving for the life that is low and feeble and declining.

In these bodies of ours we feel it—in sickness and in health. We know how life has its reverses and its revivings. There comes weakness, weariness, the loss of living power; and we pass into the winter of our discontent. But as long as life is there, there is the hope of reviving. And when the tide turns and life begins to flow in full force, when the pulse makes a stronger beat, there is no happier experience —we are getting back what we had lost.

You know what it means when life is low. "You are down," the doctor says. He who can use such long words when he likes, says with surprising simplicity, "You are down; that is all." You have life, but you do not have it abundantly. There is a heaviness and sluggishness. There is no pain here or there, but there is a dulness, a lethargy; and all the members feel it, and all the mind. Not the body only, but the mind, is weary and depressed and listless. Life has lost its interest, and there is no eagerness about anything. You have lost your liveliness if you have not lost your life. Everything is a burden. The stream of life is running low and slow. You need to be quickened and braced up. "Revive us again."

It is so like what happens often in our religious experience. We are not dead, but we are not in vigorous health. We are not in full possession, full enjoyment of life as Christians ought to be. We are living below our privileges, with less of life than might be ours. Our life is lower, slower, colder than it should be.

We have our faith; still we say we believe; but we have not the same fearless confidence in what we say we believe. We have a little love; but it has lost its warmth. We pray still; but our prayers are forced and formal, not the simple, happy outpouring of a full heart. We speak of Christ; but there is not the glow of affection with every word. We have our part in Christian service; we do the things

we used to do; but there is no enthusiasm in it.

There are many influences about us that cool us down, and deaden the best in us, that paralyse and bind the soul like the frost-fetters that hold the earth in the hard days of Winter. We need the Spirit of God who comes like the Springtime. "He restoreth my soul." Revival is not for the dead, but for the living. It comes when life is low. It comes to turn the tide of declining life. It comes when life is being diminished and lost—a quickening breath.

Let us remember these two things about this reviving. It comes from God, and it means gladness. "Wilt *Thou* not revive us again, that Thy people *may rejoice* in Thee?"

Whenever we think about life, we think about God. He is the Fountain of life, the Lord and Giver of life. There is a mystery about life; and the very mystery of it makes us feel that it is beyond our ken and control. We must leave this mysterious gift in the hand of the mysterious God. And as of life itself, so of this more abundant life. As the beginnings of life, so the renewings and revivings. These are from God. God never leaves a living thing. There is no life without His Spirit; and every revival is another brooding, another breathing, another coming of the Spirit of God.

This is the Old Testament view of the world. It exists in absolute dependence upon God, the Creator. Especially in the Springtime God's presence was manifest; and the Psalmists were sensible of it. "Thou renewest the face of the earth." "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it. Thou blessest the springing thereof." Especially in the Springtime —for God is at work on every side, in every bush, in every hedgerow, in every bud and blossom. See the mysterious, beautiful life! God is here. A Divine breath has touched the world. The blessing is like a breath. "The breath of Spring," we say—the soft, westland breeze that has the gentle, genial, reviving touch. It is Christ's own figure—"The wind bloweth." There is a great Spirit about us, He says, like the air, unseen, yet the source of all life. It moves in a mysterious way. "The wind bloweth"—it is Christ's figure for the Spirit of God, for the Divine in human life, for all those spiritual influences which flow in upon us, and which come from God. And, like the wind, it is beyond our command and control. We can only wait for it as we wait for God; but while we wait we pray.

This verse is a prayer. "Wilt Thou not revive us again?" And God who does not disappoint the seed, but gives it all the life for which it longs, does not disappoint the soul of His child. Trust Him, and the Summer will come. Trust Him; pray to Him; He is faithful—the God of the Springtime. "Wilt Thou not revive us again?"

This is the result—joy and gladness. "That Thy people may rejoice in Thee." It must be so. Life is so sweet and pleasant. If the living are not rejoicing, it is against nature. Then life is not full and abundant. It is crippled, hindered, depressed, diseased. We are not alive unless we are glad, not healthy unless we are happy.

There is a pleasure simply in living, when our powers have free play. There are times, rare times, when Samson-like we rise from sleep equal to anything. Such days come—when the heart rejoices in its burden, exults in something difficult to do. There are such seasons — when languor is unknown. "Rejoicing as a strong man."

So it is in the higher life. If you want to be happy, you must be strong; you must put your whole heart into your religion. There is nothing more miserable than a religion that is only half-hearted, that is in any way cold and insincere. When there is no confidence in your believing, and no warm glow in your affection, and no spirit in the forms, you cannot be happy; you want more life.

The time of reviving is the time of rejoicing. There is no happier time in all the year than the weeks of Spring. It is the time of brightness and beauty and bounty, and above all, the time of promise and of hope. This is its chiefest charm, this youthful, hopeful feeling. We feel that the year is before us now; and the tender beauty of the beginnings is all the greater that we see in them

the promise of more and more. There are flowers, but there will be many more. There are green blades, but there will be golden sheaves. There are songs though the singers are few, but the chorus of the year is yet to come. This is the gladness of the Springtime; and this is the joy of every time of reviving—it is but the beginning of a larger blessing. God is the God of Hope, the Giver of all the promises.

Spring is a promise, a beginning; and the Christian life is a spiritual Springtime. It is not Winter, and it is not Summer, but a season between. It is the life we have when the Winter is past, and the rains are over and gone, and the flowers appear, and the song of gladness is heard in the soul. It is the life which carries in the heart of it, clear and sweet and strong, the prophecy of a more perfect life. This is the joy of it.

Look at some lovely scene—this orchard in blossom, this garden in the pride of its flowers. "It is at its best," we say—"Ah! it is past its best." It is never so of Christian experience and Christian character—never past its best, never come to its best. For this whole life of ours is but the Springtime of a year. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." And when we think of Heaven, we think of Summer—the Summer of the sons of God and the crowning of the year. But there is an old hymn that is wiser. The sweetest of the seasons is not Summer, but Spring; and life would

lose its gladness if it lost this peculiar note of endless expectation and hope. So this wise hymn says, "There everlasting Spring abides." A life ever satisfied yet ever seeking, ever having yet ever hoping, never losing this happy element of promise, of eternal progress and increase! It is the loveliest thing on earth—the everlasting youthfulness of the soul renewed in Christ: and it is likest Heaven. The angels are all young. "There everlasting Spring abides."

XXII.

THE ALMOND BLOSSOM.

"Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten My word to perform it."—JEREMIAH i. 11, 12.

XXII.

THE ALMOND BLOSSOM.

SHAKESPEARE tells us that we may find "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything"; and in our text we may with Jeremiah find "tongues in trees." We are out in orchard and garden. "The rod of an almond-tree" means a blossoming branch, a branch of the almond-tree covered with its lovely pink-white blossom. Such a sight is suggestive—it speaks—there are "tongues in trees."

God is for ever teaching us from the Book of Nature as the bright pages pass, as one season follows another; and there is something specially lovely and happy in what comes to us in Spring and early Summer—the wonderful waking out of Winter's sleep and gloom, and the putting forth of blade and bud and blossom in fair promise of all the wealth that is yet to be.

It is this that we find in our text. It suggests the early Summer and the loveliness of orchard and garden. Surely among the most beautiful of natural objects on which our eyes can rest are the fruit-bearing trees, not only in the Autumn days when

they carry their burden of ripe fruit, but still more in early Summer when there hangs about them a cloud of blossom. We are never weary of gazing at this recurring loveliness, so exquisite and yet so fleeting. See it altogether and it looks like a mass of snow with which the laden branches are gleaming. Look into it and see how delicate it is in every petal, how perfect in every line, how pure and soft and exquisite in tint and texture. It is a dream of loveliness, a fairness too fair for words, so beautiful that it passes all description; and though we are only guessing when we say so, we like to think of it thus, that Jeremiah was in the orchard looking at such a sight when the Word of the Lord came to him.

We may believe that Jeremiah felt the burden of his destiny, thought of the prophet's task laid upon him with apprehension and shrinking. "Then said I, Ah! Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am a child." "But the Lord said unto me, Say not I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee, thou shalt go: and whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak." Then followed swift thoughts about the strength and guardian care of Jehovah, and the prophet felt as if the unseen Hand of the Eternal had touched his lips. It was his solemn ordination-hour.

Now what followed was possibly this, and thus the text comes in. Jeremiah was in the orchard at Anathoth that still Summer evening when this call to be a prophet came upon him, when he had

passed through such a spiritual experience as these earlier verses describe. Pausing entranced after the intense experience, the prophet realised that his eyes were turned steadily towards a blossoming almond-branch ; and he realised too, as happens often at such times, that he had been looking at the thing before him unconsciously with eyes that saw not. But when the strain passed, and the thing before his eyes was really seen, then there came a voice into his spirit—"Jeremiah, what seest thou? Jeremiah, what are you looking at?"—and like one in a dream he said, "I am looking at the branch of an almond-tree." Then said the Lord, "Thou hast well seen, for I will hasten My word to perform it."

Now we need a word of explanation here. The significance of the symbol of the almond-branch is not understood at once from our Version, because it is a translation, and you can hardly keep in a translation all that is suggested by the original words.

In verse 12—"I will hasten My word," should rather be, "I will watch over My word to perform it." The point of the passage is that there is a kind of play upon the word "almond-tree" and the word "watch," for these two words are almost identical. An "almond-tree" in Hebrew is "Shakëd," and it comes from the verb "Shakad," which means "to be sleepless" or "to watch." The tree is so called because it is the earliest blossoming tree in the East, the first to wake from its Winter sleep.

"Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see the branch of a *Waker;* and Jehovah said to me, Thou hast well seen, for I am *wakeful* over My word to perform it." Such is the parallel—"I see the branch of a *Watcher;* yes, for *I watch* over My word to perform it."

You see the unconscious natural poetry of primitive times which called the almond-tree "Shakëd," or the "Wakeful" tree because it blossoms in Palestine early, while all the rest of the plant-world seems asleep. It has been compared to the snowdrop with us, the first sign of approaching Spring. It wakes from the long sleep of Winter before all other trees, and displays its beautiful garland of blossom while its companions remain leafless and apparently lifeless.

So we can understand the prophet's vision. It is this habit of early wakefulness that is expressed by the Hebrew name of the tree, and when Jeremiah looked upon it that was the thought. If the tree, for this remarkable peculiarity, was a proverb of watching and waking, the sight of it, or a branch of it, with its white blossom, would be sufficient to suggest this idea. So thought Jeremiah, and God gave him the thought. Here is the emblem of wakefulness, and God says, "I am wakeful, I keep watch over My word to perform it."

This was the reassuring and inspiring thought which the blossoming almond-bough brought to Jeremiah. He was commanded to speak the word of One who slumbers not nor sleeps. In the end

every word of His must be fulfilled to the last letter. Though the delay may be long like the Winter sleep, and though the ears of men be dull of hearing, yet God will never speak in vain. "I watch over My word to perform it."

Is it not a lesson that comes to us every Spring-time when the sleeping buds and seeds wake to life again? They have not been lost and buried and forgotten. God remembers them. Does not any flourishing tree in early Summer bring to the mind of the thoughtful this same idea of watchful care, of sleepless, vigilant activity? Sure as the season comes, the buds break on the bare boughs and the trees are kindled into beauty with the white and rosy blossoms that cover them like a glory. There are months of Winter bleakness and bareness, but with the sunshine of the Summer-prime come the tokens that God has not forgotten. There is a Watcher over the trees and over the word, and He slumbers not nor sleeps. When the buds break and the blossoms bloom, so shall My word be. "I watch to perform it."

This is a great thought, and one to be laid well to heart; for we easily say—"What is a word? What are words?" So frail and fleeting, light and perishing! Mere breath and sound! What a Babel of talk, and how little of it comes to anything! Vows are forgotten, promises are broken, something said to-day is utterly out of mind to-morrow. A speaker's

eloquence makes only a transient impression on the surface like the touch of the wind on the waters. A word has no existence, no influence when the sound of it is spent. Words are daily spoken which have no watcher. There is the word, but there is not the watchful interest and determination, the sleepless care and activity to see that it is fulfilled.

Of course it is not always so. In another aspect the words that are but fleeting breath or passing sound are most enduring and most mighty. The spoken word is the mightiest agency on earth. It is the embodiment of thought and emotion. It carries truth and passion. It is by words that spiritual power goes from soul to soul.

But, as we know very well, the ultimate value of any word must be determined by the character and intention of the person by whom it is spoken. We must take into account both the word and what lies behind the word. If a word is truth, then it lives; if it is spoken by a true man, if he who speaks it is sincere and sure and strong, then his word will be fulfilled. There are some people whose words you pay little attention to. If you did put any weight upon them, you would only be preparing for yourself a bitter disappointment; because you know that however pleasant at the moment, when the speaker turns away from you, he thinks no more of what he has said. It is different when you deal with an earnest man who watches the word till it is fulfilled.

There are words that are so bound up with the

person that you must say—"Who speaks it? and will he remember? and will he keep it?" The word cannot be severed from the person. *Its* worth is *his* worth.

Now it is in the direction of this thought that we find the teaching of the text.

Jeremiah is brought to the conviction that he is commanded to speak a word which must be fulfilled, because it is God's word. The prophet's word might remain on the earth seemingly as unproductive of any life as the twigs of an almond-tree in Winter. But the breath of Spring blows gently and genially upon it; and just as at the fit time the almond-tree burst into radiant life, covering itself with a snowy shower of lovely blossom, so in good time would the word sent forth from God prove its vitality and its power. It, too, would leap to life and blossom abundantly.

So it comes most fitly in this opening chapter when Jeremiah is appointed to be spokesman for Jehovah. It was a tremendous task to be a prophet in such a time and to such a people. No wonder he shrank from it. His was not the prompt and eager spirit of Isaiah crying out, "Here am I, send me." Jeremiah was sensitive and shrinking. Yet what did he become? God made out of this soft-hearted, tremulous man "a tower and a fortress." He stood like "a fenced city and an iron pillar," assailed and persecuted, yet never flinching.

And this is the message that encouraged the shrinking prophet at the beginning of his task—

that his word is God's word and therefore cannot fail—this truth that the will of God must be done and always is done, in the world that God has made and is making. He knows that, whatever be his own fortune, that word will go on conquering and to conquer till it has subdued all things to itself. So Jeremiah is strengthened at the beginning. See the orchards and gardens. Every cloud of snowy blossom says, "I watch My word to fulfil it."

This, then, is the great thought of our text. We are here in the world, and the word of God is with us. It has come to us by His prophets and messengers. God's word is here in the world, and God is in the world with the word, watching over it to perform it.

We may believe that what was said of the word of Jehovah by Jeremiah is true of every word that is a word of God. Here is something we cannot fight against and cannot escape. We may be too preoccupied with other things to hear the prophets. We may be too busy to read God's Word. We may resent it when it presses upon us and we do not want it, when it pierces through all our business and pleasure, through all the noise we make, reaching the conscience and strangely stirring the heart. We may meet it and treat it with neglect or coldness. Jerusalem may slay her prophets and stone them that are sent unto her. In many ways we may try to silence the voices. But the word of truth is

deathless, and its end is sure. "The grass withereth; the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

"And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." This is what we have in Christ—a word from God. Has it ever impressed you that you and I are asked to live our lives according to a word spoken to us by One who spoke as with the authority of heaven? Have you ever realised that we are asked to trust the word of Jesus, to venture upon it, to build our life on what He tells us? Yet so it is. If there was one conviction which possessed His soul more than another it was the conviction that He spoke from God the Father words in which men may trust as the very truth of God. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; My words shall not pass away."

Where is there such a message as this in Christ? He tells of God the Father and His infinite mercy. He speaks of life and love, of sin and forgiveness, of rest. He tells of a way that leads to life, and a way whose end is death. What a word is here in Christ! Who will trust it, venture his life upon it, believing that this is the way of peace and blessedness and immortality? Do we really believe that, amid all the voices that assail our ears, there is one voice that is the Voice Divine? "God has spoken unto us by His Son."

So great is our responsibility. We are living our life in this world, and the word of God is with

us, and over all is the Watcher of the word; and the Watcher, whose hand is on all the movement of life, will surely overrule all so that His word shall be accomplished. That word has a solemn meaning for you and me. If what Christ said is true, then what is to become of your life and mine as we are living it to-day? And what Christ said is true. You know it; it rings true in your deepest being. It compels your confession that it finds your conscience and speaks to you as only God, who made you, and knows you, can speak. And because it is God's word, God watches to perform it.

In the days when garden and orchard are covered with the glory of blossoming trees what does Christ say to us? "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree and all the trees." Find "tongues in trees." Let them in the beauty of their blossoming tell you that God, who watches over the hidden life to wake it again in the Springtime, watches over every word that has been spoken by His prophets and by His Son—watches over every word to wake it to its fulfilment in life.

Believe it; be true to it; and the Watcher of the word will not fail you. Remember the young prophet in the orchard at Anathoth. "What seest thou, Jeremiah?" "A blossoming branch of an almond-tree." "Thou hast well seen, for I watch over My word to perform it."

XXIII.

AFTER SUMMER.

"The Summer is ended."—JEREMIAH viii. 20.

XXIII.

AFTER SUMMER.

WE are all more or less sensitive to our environment, influenced and impressed by the scenery that is about us. The days are different; the seasons come and go; and in the changing face of Nature we find the mirror of our moods, the reflection of our experiences.

We are familiar with the kind of thoughts and feelings that come to us now when "the Summer is ended." When September comes and October, when Autumn days are here, the gladness and glee of the year have gone, and there is a tender sadness over the landscape. The corn is all cut and carried away; and we look across the pale stubble-fields, bare and empty—all stripped of their abundant loveliness; and we know that there has passed a glory from the earth. It is sad to see the flowers dying, and the leaves falling, and the harvest over. The brightness is gone; the year is hastening to its close. "The Summer is ended."

Let us take one or two thoughts that such a word brings to us.

I. "The Summer is ended." That is true, and it may be sad; but thank God that you have seen another Summer. It is something to be thankful for.

No doubt, our first thought is the thought of what is gone. It is the difference between Spring and Autumn, like the difference between morning and evening. The glory of morning is that the light is breaking and growing and coming, and all the bright hours are yet before us. But when evening comes, the light is fading, diminishing, dying, and the shadows creep on. So in the Springtime we live in hope, for all the glory that is yet to be. There comes to us the promise of another Summer, with its wealth of life and beauty. Oh, the gladness of that day when we feel the breath of Spring upon the world, when we say, "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the time of the singing of birds is come," when Nature rises rejoicing and puts on her beautiful garments. We have the happy thought of what is coming—long, light, lovely days. But in Autumn we think of what is gone—"ended." Is there anything more melancholy than the ashes of the commonest household fire? Look at them, and let them remind you of what was once bright and warm and lively, as friends sat about the hearth in happy fellowship. That is the sadness of the bare fields, and brown withered leaves, blown by the chilly winds about our path. These are the ashes of Summer—the ashes of Nature's gorgeous funeral pyre in which the pomp and glory of the Summer burnt itself out. They tell

us of the loveliness we have lost. There has passed a glory from the earth. "The Summer is ended."

We have seen it; and what a season it has been of bounty and of beauty! You can remember days when it was good to be alive, out on the hills or by the sea, in field and wood, the sunshine and the skies, the sweet air, the radiant health, the verdure and the loveliness of trees and flowers. God gave you such Summer days, and have you thanked Him for them? Such a world it is, telling of His delight in His creation and the love with which He loves us. Oh, the fulness of it, the wealth of life and beauty lavished on every roadside hedge, on every green hill and waving wood! "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," and of this fulness have all we received. Ended? Yes; but we have seen it. What memories of Summer days!

The bright pageant has passed, and we have seen it. I knew one man who wanted to see it, and he was taken away before it came. He said in the Winter days, at the turn of the year, that he wished to live and see just once again the flowers and the grass and the beauty that the Summer makes. That prayer was not answered. Before the flowers appeared on the earth, we laid him beneath the sod. But we have seen it, thank God!

We have seen it again, seen it come and go, another Spring and Summer, the bloom and freshness, the wonder and delight. And in our brief life it means much. Of the few Summers we can see, to

see another. In the "Journal of Henry Ryecroft" I remember reading this—"How many more Springs can I hope to see?" says the lonely, thoughtful man who had retired from London to a country life. "A sanguine temper would say ten or twelve; let me dare to hope humbly for five or six; that is a great many. Five or six Springtimes welcomed joyously, lovingly watched from the first celandine to the budding of the rose, who shall dare to call it a stinted boon? Five or six times the miracle of earth reclad, the vision of splendour and loveliness which tongue has never yet described set before my gazing. To think of it is to fear that I ask too much."

"Forget not all His benefits." Yes, it is a great boon to be here alive when the bright pageant goes past. "The Summer is ended;" but, thank God, we have seen another Summer.

II. Another thought is this. "The Summer is ended," and we know what comes next. The year changes from the bright bloom to blighted barrenness, from glory to gloom, from sunny skies and soft showers and warm winds to storms and snows. But let us not fancy that the gladness and the good have gone from us. Let us say a good word for Winter too.

Winter has its own beauty and its own keen, eager life. There is a matchless beauty in the woods, when the bare trees are whitened by the frost, and in the wide, white fields of dazzling snow. Certainly the Winter landscape has a loveliness all

its own; and when we step out into the frosty air, or when we battle bravely against wind and rain, we feel the bracing influence of harder weather. The keen air does not depress; it quickens and invigorates. Frosty but kindly are the Winter days, and soon we lose the sense of gloom and still rejoice.

It is not difficult to see that for our health and vigour, and for our highest life, we need what Winter brings to us. How clear the contrast between the races of tropical countries, self-indulgent and indolent, and those who are trained and disciplined in the more rugged and severe climate of the North! In the heat life is languid and faint, luxurious and indulgent; not strong and resolute, not keen and swift and efficient. Even for moral ends, our climate is better for having some stern severity when Winter comes upon us.

There is this, too, which perhaps you have not thought about. It is this season that gives us at its best our indoor life about the fireside. As Cowper says of Winter:—

> "I crown thee King of intimate delights,
> Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know."

In the short days of our cold, cloudy climate, and the long evenings, at the fireside, in the lamplight—do you remember how the poet of the Seasons describes it? When you hear the wind and rain without, or the muffled beating of the driven snow, so sheltered and at home:—

"There studious let me sit
And hold high converse with the mighty dead."

Perhaps that is the best of Winter. It gives us all our indoor life. Indeed, "Home" is a Northern word—a word not found in sultry, Southern climes, not found where men are living out of doors. Only among those whom the cold drives to seek shelter and retreat, only at the hearth where the Winter fire is kindled and the family gathered—there we know the life, the fellowship, the intimate bonds of love that make us live together and be at home. The very word is found only where there is Winter as well as Summer.

We should not complain of our rugged climate. There is a moral influence in the severity after the softness; and we may thank God for the frosts and snows and sleets and bleak winds, even as when we see such changes reflected in our life, in hardship and suffering and adverse fortune. There are mild and genial influences under which we may expand and grow; but there are also influences that are helpful though hard, kindly though cold.

"The Summer is ended;" but the good is not gone, for God has made Winter too. Let us be ready to respond to God's varied leading and discipline, saying:—

"Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me;
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see."

III. "The Summer is ended." For most of us it

means this too—coming home again; and coming home to our work. The holiday is past—the time of lighter, freer life; and we face the winter—the time of more steady, settled, strenuous work. You shrink a little from the first plunge into it. You know the feeling of the first days in the collar. But still we know that this is good—for life is work.

No! We could not live always as we have been living through the few weeks when our work is laid aside. It could not satisfy us. We begin the holiday with great anticipation; and we find it in fact much less than we were looking for; and we are content to leave it. When the time of relaxation is over, is there not a touch of disappointment? Does a holiday ever come to be all that we thought it would be? Perhaps one of its best uses is to reconcile us to home and work, and let us see that these are best.

Certainly, it is essential to any real welfare of spirit, essential to healthy-mindedness, that we should have a clear perception and a hearty acceptance of the work God gives us to do, finding in it the great purpose of life, finding in it what gives substance and value, dignity and nobleness to life. Ah! it is good to sit in the sunshine, to wander over moor and shore, enjoying those hours of freedom and repose which are so healthful and so happy. But could you take that for life? Is it enough? Did you not find yourself thinking of your work, looking forward to the winter days, planning some better method, cherishing a nobler end, a deeper desire to work well?

No! it would not do. You cannot lounge through life indolently. You cannot satisfy yourself with sport and play and pleasure. It is not these that contribute the elements of real strength and worth to our life. And it is good that we should remind ourselves of this when "the Summer is ended," and our work is again in our hands.

We measure our life most truly when we are looking back upon it. And this is the only reflection and remembrance that awakens a satisfaction deep in the heart—"I have finished the work." Life is work and play, and there are just two kinds of life. There is one that makes the work less than the play—when we work in order that we may play. There is another that makes the play second to the work—when we play in order that we may work better. You can measure your own life as you balance work and play—in your thoughts and in your days; and be careful that you do not find your life going from you in a restless, dissipated, easy way that leaves little solid work behind it.

That is the side of our life it is good to think of when the days are past—not the Summer days, light and happy, but the Winter days, studious, serious, strenuous, when our best work is done.

IV. Take this last reflection which is the thought of the text. "The Summer is ended;" another season has passed.

The text has an interesting meaning here, which

few of those who repeat it think of. It has most likely a political reference. Threatened by the great power of Assyria, the land of Judah was looking to Egypt for help, but the help did not come. The Summer days passed. The time of campaigning was over. Kings do not go forth to war in Winter. The long Summer went past and there was no sign of help. "We are not saved." The prophet hears the cry of the captive people, carried away by the victorious invader, because the hopes they cherished had been cherished in vain, as they looked to Egypt through the Summer months and no help came. "The Summer is ended, and we are not saved."

But the words have passed into our common speech as a cry of despair over lost chances, seasons that have come and gone and been missed or mis-spent. The wailing word!

It is evidently true of the harvest. It is like many another proverb taken from agriculture—"Make hay when the sun shines." It carries the same lesson of opportunity to be swiftly, diligently used or lost for ever. "He that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." It is folly to let the golden days go past and have nothing gathered. Harvests must be reaped in harvest-time. And it is true of our passing life. Like the year, life is a succession of times and seasons, each of which has its destined work; and that being done, all is well; that left undone, all is not well.

God gives us our times—seed-time and harvest, and Summer and Winter. This is the Divine discipline

under which we live. Large opportunities are put in our way, and it is left with ourselves whether we shall use them or neglect them. There is no coercion to compel us to turn them to account; and the wheels of time will not be reversed to bring them back once they are gone. There are measured opportunities in life—soon spent, easily lost, never recovered.

So this wild, wailing word heard so often, this despairing cry! "The harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved." We cannot shut out of our ears the words of doom and despair. Hope springs eternal; yet behind all our hopefulness there is the sense of doom at last, when hope is dead. So the Bible appeals to us—"Work while it is day;" "Redeem the time."

What a wonderful gift is this of time! A little section cut out of eternity and given us to do our work in, the season in which we are saved or lost. Do we not feel it more and more with every returning season when "the Summer is ended" and the year sinks to its close? It may seem safe enough in Springtime to laugh and sing and play when every day brings Summer nearer, when every day is longer than the day that went before it. But life has another aspect when the Autumn leaves are falling and the Winter storms begin.

We realise that life is going from us; and life is opportunity. It is "this thy day." If we miss it, our day is done; and we may make the prophet's lament our own. "The harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved."

XXIV.

THE WAVES OF TIME.

"And the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries."—1 CHRONICLES xxix. 30.

XXIV.

THE WAVES OF TIME.

PERHAPS you have not noticed in your reading this striking phrase—"the times that went over him." The Chronicler is writing about David, and he refers to other written records in which may be found a fuller account concerning the great king. "The acts of David the king, first and last, they are written in other books with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him and over Israel and over all the kingdoms of the countries." Let us take the words by themselves. They may give us some thoughts about life—as another year of life has almost gone over us.

First, notice this—*the times*, not the time: the times, that is, the events, the changes that took place during the life and reign of David as they affected him and his people Israel, and then reached out in their influence to their neighbours, the kingdoms around them. Not mere abstract time, but time that is history, experience.

When the Chronicler speaks of the "times" that

went over David and his kingdom, he does not mean the succession of moments and hours and years which we call time. The word signifies rather the epochs of human life with their varied experiences. In fact, the sense is just that which is present to our minds when we speak of ourselves or of others as having "a good time," "a sad time," "a great time," "a happy time," and so on. By such expressions we mean that for a certain period we had certain experiences of this character or that. And this is what the writer refers to when, writing of David the king, he sums up all the history of his forty years' reign as "the times that went over him and over Israel and over all the kingdoms of the countries."

It reminds us of that phrase which we find so frequently on the page of Scripture—"It came to pass." It is the usual word in the Bible introducing any incident or event, marking the beginning of new periods, new chapters, new lives. So the narrative goes on like a panorama, like the throwing of new pictures on the screen. What a varied procession is history as man after man, event after event "comes to pass!"—"The times went over him."

The reference then to "the times" here is to the events of those times—that is, as has been said, "to the strange vicissitudes and extremes of fortune and condition which characterised so dramatically and remarkably the life of King David. Shepherd-boy, soldier, court-favourite, outlaw, freebooter, and all but

brigand: rebel, king, fugitive, saint, sinner, psalmist, penitent: he lived a life full of strangely marked alternations."

So it was in David's personal history; and so it was also for his people. In the period of David's public career the times that passed over Israel were momentous and memorable. Distraction and unrest; the confusion incident to the overthrow of one dynasty and the establishment of another; settlement and order and a sense of security under a new king; then revolution and civil war in the revolt of Absalom; and then security and repose again—all these alternated in the short space of forty years. They were stirring and strange years for the king and the people; and we do not wonder that they are called "the times that went over him and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries."

The writer, then, is not referring to a succession of moments, or days, or years. He wants rather to emphasise the fact that life is made up of epochs, of sections of time, each with its definite features and opportunities and experiences, and each "unlike the rest that lie on either side of it."

Life as it may be remembered and reflected upon —life as it may be regarded from altitudes of thought, looks sometimes to us as, they say, the earth looks when you gaze down upon it from a balloon in mid-air. There is an appearance of singular variety as the wide earth shrinks to a strange smallness and spreads itself beneath like

a piece of patchwork. Here lie fields of one crop, close bordered by fields of another sort; there woodland, and there miles of heath; there cities, and there the sea; and the highways of human traffic going through all; and the ships moving upon the face of the waters.

It is true of life. After all, what life can be called monotonous or uneventful? We talk of things as "going on as usual"—but how changeful even the usual is! During these past twelve months, to go no further back, there have been varied "times" for all of us. We have had this sort of time and the other; and if you take a thoughtful look back, you will wonder at the diversity of your experiences, the multitude of your opportunities, the alternations in your moods and hopes, the variety of the events which have happened in even your commonplace lot. It would not be easy—it would be almost impossible to describe, even if you tried, the multiplicity and the variety of "the times that have gone over you."

Hence at seasons like this, when we review the past, it is not the months and days we chiefly scan, but mainly the experiences which they brought.

If we think of our own nation and other nations, for example, our minds go back to great events. Turn the files of a daily newspaper and see "the times that have gone over us and over all the kingdoms and the countries." Read about the

death of kings and great men, the noise of war and the coming of peace, changes in the map of Europe, political strife and social unrest, intellectual movements and religious controversy, great disasters and great heroisms; times of strain and tense feeling, then times of relief and prosperity and hope. We remember how those things have been which make history.

And for ourselves—we remember our times of enjoyment and adventure, and our times of work; our times of anxiety and stress, and our times when the strain passed, and we found rest again; our times of light, and our times of sadness; our times of adversity, and our times of success. In our own individual history, what we look back upon is a succession of events and experiences. They "came to pass"; they "went over us." We remember them all, sunny and sad—intense pure joys and keen blinding griefs—happy and prosperous events, humiliations and defeats—hours of decisive religious experience, never to be forgotten, and hours when we were down in the depths. So the days were filled. These are our memories.

We think, if we have any thought at all, as we scan the bygone years, of "the times that went over us and over Israel and over all the kingdoms of the countries."

But I want you to notice this very singular expression—"The times that *went over* him."

Our usual way of speaking is this—we say that *we go through* a time, not that the time *goes over us*. We say, for example, of some one that he has *passed through* a heavy time, a sore time. You say that you "*had*" a good time, a gladsome time, or the reverse—you *had* it.

But how powerful and how true this conception is of our times as *passing over* us! Think of it. Here we stand to-day, you and I, the same individuals, the same separate souls who stood at the end of last year. Many things have come and gone—*we* remain. Where are your times now, your times so different, so marvellously chequered and contrasted? They are all past—the best of them and the worst of them. They are gone, and *you* are here.

You speak of having "gone through" those times; and, regarding life from one point of view, that is true. But it is equally true that your times have "gone over" you—like waves washing over a rock. Regard life as affected, or moulded, or altered by the events of life; and the impression remains with you of something abiding, like the rock, which is worked upon by a succession of varied experiences—like the waves. This, too, is life—something abiding, *yourself*, which is played upon and worked upon by a succession of varied experiences which shape character.

You and I abide still—older by a year—the same yet not the same—wiser perhaps, stronger perhaps, sadder perhaps, more patient and peaceful, more

Christ-like it may be. You and I abide—our times have gone by. They "went over us."

One can hardly tell what figure was in the quaint old writer's mind, or whether he had any figure in mind at all. Surely he had some picture before his fancy. There is poetry in the quaint expression.

Perhaps he thought of a river whose ceaseless flow is ever towards the sea—the river whose ripples and eddies are ever changing and changed, but the stones of whose bed, worn smooth by years of soft friction, remain. Or perhaps he may have thought of the crying winds—the winds that sometimes rush with roaring over the earth and sometimes pass in whispers over the grass—the wind that passes, while the things over which it blows remain. Or take the illustration I used a moment ago. We may think of that which meets our eye any day by the seashore, where a rock is submerged and swept by each successive wave—now emerging black and streaming, the brown seaweed glistening in the sun, and again lost under a roll of green water crested with creamy white.

River and wind and wave sweep on; the fixed things remain. And even so our "times go over us."

To-day we are the same, yet not the same; we are changed by the times which have gone over us. We cannot live through such times and experiences without learning something, gaining something.

Indeed, this is the great thing in life. Its wisdom and its real success is to gain the permanent from the passing—to gain permanent results from passing events, permanent profits from passing experiences —as you use the passing things of time to lay up treasure in heaven.

This is the blessing of our education. "Childhood's years are passing o'er us"—the school-days are soon done; but they leave something that is always ours. So it is for the youth at College or in his apprenticeship—those momentous times go gaily past, and they leave how much! So it is in any position of responsibility, of new experience—the years in the hospital to a young doctor; the years at sea to the sailor; the years at some great work to the engineer. The times go over him, but they leave something. And in our life—it may be through long sickness, how the anxious, weary, monotonous days come and go! Or in sorrow—the days were dark and lonely and tearful; or in some companionship; or in some work. The waves of such times went over us; but did we gain nothing from them?

Every "time" that goes over you brings something all its own and distinctively its own. One "time" may have served to smooth away some roughness in your temper and character, so strong and mighty was the rush of it as it went over you. In another "time" you learned that which you cannot and never will forget, and which became a part of that store of wisdom which is the light of life. Another

"time" left you that for which you have cause to be grateful to God and has given you memory-pictures which will never fade. Yet another "time" brought you an opportunity for some effort or some service which you seized or missed.

The times are past — but is what the times brought of profit and worth part of yourself to-day? Are you and I better, purer, more useful men and women? Is it, or is it not, in vain that our "times have gone over us"?

Thus we come to the thought that in these our times there is purpose. The flow of the times is not mechanical or at haphazard. If that were so, you and I would be the victims of fate or the playthings of chance; and our hearts tell us that we are neither the one nor the other. We believe better about the world and life than that.

The seasons come; but they are most beautifully ordered. And as summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, tempest and fair weather, do all together make up the year, and ensure the springing of the seed and the fruitfulness of the plant, so the times are ordered in a man's life. They flow over us like a river, but they do not move themselves—they are ordered and sent. "My times are in Thy hand," said one of the Psalmists.

Indeed, we may say that these are God's appointed agents or influences for the bringing of our opportunities and the shaping of our lives. Take the life

of our Lord Himself. If ever anyone lived with the sense that everything came to Him appointed and sent by the Father in Heaven, it was He. His hours struck when God appointed. What times went over Him in the Wilderness and the Garden and upon the Tree! But even so the will of God was done for the salvation of the world. "My times are in Thy hand," said the Psalmist, the deep truth in which wise word is this—that, whatever your times may be, God sees that they are guided to the end which is for ever best.

Divine purpose and Divine wisdom and Divine love are in all the times. There is no confusion to Him who sees the end from the beginning. It means good. "My times are in Thy hand."

At the close of the year I give you this—"The times went over him." The times roll over us like the seas that break upon some isolated rock; and when the tide has fallen and the waves subside, the rock is there. So *we* remain after the rolling days and weeks of the year—the same yet not the same, changed by the changing times for better or for worse.

The significance of any event is not in its duration or its magnitude, but in its effect. It leaves behind it something permanent. As epochs of history, like the times of Greece and Rome, leave results which abide now in the life of the world; as lives of great men pass, but leave something; so in our personal

history the significance of events and experiences lies in the effect they produce upon us.

You have seen a huge stalagmite, a great mass of hard stone, tons in weight. It was formed by the falling of single drops of water, charged with lime, from the roof of some cave. Drop by drop the ceaseless succession came, each giving its share to the whole through many thousands of years. So in our lives each thing that comes to pass leaves its effect. You grow in character, you reach your present mental and moral stature, by what is left in you and on you by the things that go past. Some experiences chasten—some purify—some renew. Some give light, and some rob the life of the light of hope and joy. Some make us more tender, and some more strong. What is seen passes—what is unseen remains in the fabric of our character.

There are some who can find in common events and commonplace experiences a richness of wisdom and a wealth of blessing greater than can be found by a meaner nature in the sublimest opportunity. What we need is the soul that can receive all that is given—sensitive to receive impressions, docile to learn lessons, watchful to seize the opportunities and get the blessings. So men live, and learn, and grow, and become wiser and greater.

We want to bring ourselves into harmony with this thought of Divine purpose in all that goes over us. Then as we, too, use our times, as we accept

the will of God and answer to the opportunities and the possibilities of our times, we create in us and upon us what is worthy for time and for eternity. If we have this spirit, then we can indeed say—

"Even let the unknown to-morrow
Bring with it what it may."

One thing is sure, and one thing we may do. God's will is blessed; and we may do that will or bear its burden with willing and believing hearts. So shall we abide our times with calm and patient minds—be they many or few, be they what they may. And when they have all gone over us, even to the last, then when the Great Angel, with one foot in the sea and another on the dry land, proclaims that Time shall be no longer, may we stand in the light of God—proved faithful in time for the reward of eternity, trained by the life of our times for the life everlasting!

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XXV.

A NEW YEAR SERMON.

"In the beginning God"—GENESIS i. 1.

XXV.

A NEW YEAR SERMON.

ON the first Sunday of a New Year I choose as my text for my first sermon the first words of the Bible—for I can find nothing fitter. We are again at a beginning of things; and at every beginning, whether of a world or a week, a year or a life, or anything at all, the great and eternal reality on which everything depends and from which everything proceeds is—*God.*

The first sentence of this great Book is itself of unparalleled majesty. The opening note of the Bible's music is a grand melodious sound. It is as if the hands of a mighty angel had fallen on the keys of a great organ, sending out a chord which sounds through the world and quivers to the innermost heart and soul of him who hears it. And the theme thus begun is carried, on changing keys, all through to the close.

If one were to follow the figure further, it might be said that the Bible is like a great musical work in which the same theme is caught up, and repeated, and transformed, and pursued through various keys,

appearing and reappearing, now in one way and now in another, but always recognisable by those who have ears to hear. So the Bible repeats, all through, only that with which it began. It is everywhere and always—God, God, God. He is now the Creator, now the Preserver, now the Deliverer, now the Judge, and at the last, the Father. But the essence of the final and fullest revelation is in the earliest word. Through all the changing pages, so full of interest because so changing, we see and hear always this—God, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

So it begins—with a great assertion. It breaks on us at once—a mystery; not a mystery of darkness but a mystery of light; and the heart leaps up to receive it—without argument or proof. There are no proofs here.

No one need go to the Bible for proofs that God exists, for the Bible never attempts to prove God's being. The Bible takes God for granted. It does not grope after God; it does not speculate about God; at no time does it adopt an apologetic tone or assume the defensive. The Bible declares God, reveals God, asserts God. With unequalled boldness it begins—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Thus what we need to satisfy the universal want of our thought-life and spirit-life is supplied. Sooner or later our minds in their movements backwards come against the blank impenetrable wall of the Un-

knowable. We cannot conceive of an unbeginning beginning, of an uncaused cause. A notion of a beginning of things and of a cause of the beginning is a necessity in our thought-life. If we have no thought of God, we can do no more than follow an endless chain of causes backwards until the spirit, unable for further flight, stops, wearied and baffled, at the verge of the Unknowable. But where the human mind says, "I do not know," the Bible says, "God." "In the beginning God."

One clear word! As I said, it supplies what satisfies us; and if you want to know how it satisfies, then follow on. Take all that the Bible reveals in this first word, God. It is no empty word, no barren mystery; it means intensely, and means good.

One clear word—not proved but presented. This is not an argument, but a revelation. There is no hard definition, no deep, difficult discussion. There is nothing to prepare us for it, nothing to lead us up to it, nothing to convince us of it. It begins with a blaze of light as it names the name of God. This is our experience—as we open the Bible we begin with this illuminating word; and the heart leaps up to welcome it like a sunrise. Is it not like the breaking of the day over the Eastern hills? "Let there be light;" "In the beginning God."

One would expect that the very position which the text holds would make us think of it oftener

than we do. It is the first word in the Book which we call "the Word of God."

We know what this Book has been to men, what a place it has filled in the world's life, what a message it brings, what a revelation it is; and we say—How does it begin? There is always an interest about beginnings. There is often a difficulty about beginnings. How to begin a speech, a story, a sermon, a conversation, or a letter? What shall I say first? What will it be best to say first? What is it necessary to say first, so that all the rest will come easily after it? And when we take this Book, wondering how it will begin, here is the first word, the only possible beginning—God. "In the beginning—God."

And this word is very suggestive as we find it here at the head of this chapter. It makes the world God's world. And how many there are among us who take the world away from God! How many of our teachers stand and see the wonder and the beauty, and make us see it as we could never see it without their teaching, and yet not one word of Almighty God! No, God first, then the world, God's world.

How many things follow from this!

God begins—then God is Love. What else could make Him begin? It is always love that begins; and there is love in Creation. God so loved the world that He made it. He never would have made

it if He had not loved it. God begins—then the world is dependent on God. And this is the vital thing in religion—this relation of dependence. To feel that we and our world, our human life and all that we are and all that we have, our birth, our being, our destiny—all absolutely depend on God—it is the first principle of religion. God begins—then there is Divine purpose in the world. There is meaning and progress. We can read it in this chapter; and when we follow the story through the whole book, what is it we discover in it but this—one illuminating purpose, one far-off, Divine event? Because this is God's world. God begins—and He who begins must finish, and He shall finish. Through all the strange events of history what is our confidence but this first word? When we see God at the beginning, it steadies all the rest. This is our invincible optimism—what God begins cannot end badly. This world is not a misadventure, a mistake, a thing that has gone wrong on God's hands. Instead of looking away to the future and the bright words at the end of the Bible, when we would find something to rest our faith and hope upon, should we not rather cling to this first word and say—"In the beginning God"?

But do we realise all that it means for ourselves? Shutting off from view the wideness of the world and the greatness of Creation, fix your thought upon yourself, and see how true this is—"In the beginning God."

All that is true of the world is true of you. God made you; you belong to God; you depend on God; God has a purpose with you; God loves you. Look back over your little life, and say—"In the beginning God." He made me, and made me to be His. He made me because He loved me, because He delighted in me, because He delighted in the thought of what He would do for me and of what I might do for Him. Then how false the ungodly life must be! To forget God, to forsake the love that gave us life, to live without God in the world, to break away from God in a wild, wicked independence, like the wilful son who said, "Give me my goods, and let me go"—this is sin. I say, look back—"In the beginning God." "Remember thy Creator."

We come to another beginning now, to the beginning of another year. And I know no better word for us than this.

No better beginning can we make than this—to renew and refresh our thought of God and our dependence on Him and our debt to Him, to see and confess that His place is first in our life—"In the beginning God." We miss the blessing which these days may bring if we pass thoughtlessly across the line and into the new year, if we do not stir ourselves up to take hold of God, if there is not with us to-day some thought, some conviction, some prayer, some holy vow which brings us nearer God and makes

the text true of this New Year—"In the beginning God."

The strong, helpful text comes to us this morning when we need it to steady us amid the changing years. Are we sure of this? Might not everything else for the moment be lost to our minds in the light of this great thought—God! God without whom we would not have been, God without whom we cannot be, God who will be the controlling and directing power over our lives, God to whom we shall have to render an account, and whose final verdict and judgment we all wait! If we hold this faith, what does it mean as we take up our life again at this beginning, saying, "In the beginning God?"

1. We shall surely make a new acknowledgment of God and a new dedication of ourselves to God.

Don't you think that one fault to which we must all plead guilty in the past is a certain forgetfulness of God? Most of us are busy in the world; the youth among us have youth's thoughtlessness; and God hides Himself, unseen, working by secondary causes and agents; and we do not speak much of God frankly and simply; and so He comes to be remote and dim to us. Yet, in our serious hours, there come to us deeper thoughts of God, in whom we live and move and have our being, who besets us behind and before, and lays His hand upon us. And I say this—that now, as we enter another year, the

first and all-commanding duty of every man and woman among us is to bring ourselves in utter gratefulness and humility to God, to bow our spirits before Him, to acknowledge and confess that by Him we are and have all things, and to whisper in our hearts each one some such prayer as this—"Eternal God and Father, I have forgotten Thee, but from Thee I am, and all that I have is of Thee; teach me to live in Thy light; teach me to trust in Thy Providence; teach me to do Thy will; whom have I in heaven but Thee?" It will not be ill for us in the days to come if thus for us to-day there is "in the beginning God."

2. We shall begin the hidden and not yet unfolded future in the faith that it lies in the hand of God. For to say, "In the beginning God" is to say also—"In all things God, and in the end God."

When you find God in the beginning, you cannot leave Him there and go on by yourself. He goes with you where you go. He who is "in the beginning" is Master of all to the end. He dominates all that follows, giving to all that follows its meaning and its glory. As we find God "in the beginning," we confess that in all our life God is sovereign and supreme.

And how this changes the look of everything! It is said of a great French painter that he began every picture of his with the sky. And that was wise, because everything on earth takes its appearance

from the heavens above it. Everything is different according as you see it beneath a cloudy sky or beneath the clear blue. Every feature in the scene underneath must be made subservient to the sky overhead. Every little pool reflects the heavens—the grass must be harmonious with the light that is falling on it. And God is the Heaven of our life. So a life that begins with God brings God over all things. And the whole tone, aspect, colour and character of the life are from God whom we acknowledge over us when we begin.

Let us add to our faith that here at the beginning God is, the faith that in all the future God is also; and as the days pass by, they will unfold the wonder and the grace of God our Father, and in all things we shall have light upon our path and rest unto our souls.

3. If in any real sense there is for us "in the beginning God," we shall begin with the devout resolve that, in dependence upon God's help, we shall make the future after the pattern shown us in the mount, after God's will and God's ideal. This, by the grace of Christ, will be more truly and more constantly the prayerful effort and aim of our lives.

God has His fair thought of what the future of each one of us may be, as He had of the world which He created. God knows what we ought to be and what we shall be, if His will is not crossed and thwarted by our folly and self-will and sin. In

these thoughtful days shall we not ask Him to blot out all that is vain in the past, and to cause the future to conform to His thought for us and His eternal and righteous will? Let it be with us earnestly, truly, whole-heartedly "in the beginning God," and through all the days we shall move obedient to the will of God, and our thoughts and deeds will be fair and good and fruitful of blessing to ourselves and others.

I would close with this very practical remark. If God is to be first in our life, He must be first in our days. Our life is divided into years, and the years are divided into days, that we may have so many new beginnings, and every day begin with God.

A saintly man used to say that it is good "to see the face of God before we see the face of man." Is it safe to allow the first impressions on your morning mind when you wake out of sleep refreshed —when your mind has been washed clear by the waves of sleep like the sand by the retreating sea— I say, is it safe to allow the first thoughts and impressions to come from somebody's trifling talk, or from the newspaper, or from the letters on your table? Better begin with some great reverent thought of God.

Have we any idea how important this is? Your life is what your days are; and you cannot keep your life right unless you keep your days right; and if

God is to be first in your life, He must be first in your days. "Morning piety makes everyday religion." What we are in the morning we are likely to be the day through. "In the morning I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up."

As I said, when God is in the beginning, it steadies all the rest; it sanctifies all the rest; it "redeems our life from destruction." For this is not only life—it is immortality. The life that begins with God ends with God. The life that is led by God cannot be lost to God. He is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last—and "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever."

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